

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
HISTORY OF JESUS CHRIST,

Serving to Illustrate
The PROPRIETY of his CONDUCT,
AND
The BEAUTY of his CHARACTER.

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In Two VOLUMES.

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O B S E R V A T I O N S
O N T H E
HISTORY of JESUS CHRIST.

C H A P. VII.

*Of his unwearied Attention to the Success of
his Ministry.*

THE public discourses and miracles of Jesus fill up by far the greatest part of his ministry. But there are also other incidents interspersed, which give an agreeable variety to the whole, and which had a manifest tendency to promote its credit and success.

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IN reading over the life of a hero, we not only follow him with pleasure into the great fields of action, but we have a pleasure in observing his conduct on the most ordinary occasions. Such, however, is the imperfection of human genius, that some who have distinguished themselves on great occasions, have failed in lesser ones. The appearance of Jesus is uniformly amiable and attracting.

HAVING considered his public discourses, it is now time to attend to those discourses which were spoken either in private conversations, or in occasional interviews. In attending to these, we shall have an opportunity to observe his conduct in making them subservient to the former, and to the great ends of his ministry.

S E C T. I.

Of his Intercourse with the Disciples of John.

CONSIDERING the connexion betwixt Jesus and the Baptist, both in office and

character, we must have some curiosity to know how the disciples of the Baptist stood affected to him : His manners were unlike to those of their master ; his lustre had eclipsed him in the public eye ; and to the dignity of his character John had always given the most honourable testimony. Nor is our curiosity disappointed. There are two occasions, during the public ministry of Jesus, on which the disciples of John make their appearance. First, when they find fault with his manners, and then seem to express their doubts of the dignity of his character.

HE had scarcely begun his public ministry, when the disciples of John came to him saying, " Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not ? " The complaint was specious and popular, and considering the manner in which it was urged, might have awakened the resentment of any ordinary person. The hypocrisies of the Pharisees almost on every occasion excited the attention of Jesus, and against them he often gave the most public testimony ; but on the present occasion, his conduct is singularly delicate.

The manners of the Baptist were austere, and from his manners, those of his disciples would naturally derive a tincture: Besides, John was now in prison. It is not therefore matter of wonder, if their minds were dejected, and by dejection incapacitated for relishing the complying, though innocent, manners of Jesus and his disciples. In the apology which is offered, all offensive reflections are industriously avoided. No attack is made on the distinguishing peculiarity either of the Baptist or of his followers. Jesus only defends the conduct of the disciples, and doth it in a stile and manner scarcely observable on any other occasion: "Can the children
 " of the bride-chamber mourn while the
 " bridegroom is with them? No man putteth a piece of new cloth into an old
 " garment. Neither do men put new
 " wine into old bottles *."

THE next interview of Jesus with the disciples of John turns on a point of much greater importance, the resolving of their

* See (Matth. ix. 15. 16. 17.) the whole reply at large.

doubts as to the dignity of his character. The application made on this point indeed sprang, not from the disciples, but from the Baptist; not that he entertained any doubts himself, but probably because he knew of their doubts, and wished them to be resolved to their entire satisfaction. He was now in prison, and probably suspected he would never come out of it. When therefore he "heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another *?" As the question is stated with an air of pe-remptoriness by the Baptist, so Jesus makes the reply to it with much simplicity and dignity. He enters on no train of reasoning, or of nice discussion, but with the majesty of the Messiah appeals to his doctrine and works, as the decisive evidences that he was the person: "Go and shew John again these things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up,

* Matth. xi. 2 3.

“and the poor have the gospel preached
 “unto them. And blessed is he whosoever
 “ver is not offended in me*.”

* The beauty and propriety of this answer, both as to the matter and the manner of it, is illustrated at great length in Dr Atterbury's excellent sermon on the subject. vol. 3 sermon 2. He observes, that the manner of it is remarkable, because it gave the disciples of John an occasion of answering the question themselves, which they had proposed. The matter of it he also observes is remarkable; *first*, For the gradation of its particulars; the last of which, “the poor have the gospel preached to them,” was an instance of condescension the Jews had been before little acquainted with. *2dly*, For the appositeneſs of it in relation to the persons that made the inquiry. *3dly*, For its containing the chief marks and characters of such miracles as are sufficient to confirm the authority of any person pretending to be sent from God.

The second circumstance, the appositeneſs of the matter of the reply, in relation to the persons that made the inquiry, is illustrated from the following particulars: *First*, Since they were not to be convinced by the Baptist's testimony, they are here taught to judge of the Messiah by the works they saw in him. *2dly*, Miracles were a proof of our Saviour's pre-eminence over their master, and were known to be one discriminating mark of his being the Messiah. *3dly*, The particular facts our Savi-

BUT there were other ends which he chose to accomplish by this interview. First, he takes occasion from thence to expatiate on the personal as well as the public character of the Baptist.

THE conduct of Jesus in relation to the Baptist has already been taken notice of. Till the Baptist had fulfilled his ministry, Jesus would not enter publicly on his own. His conduct on this occasion is not only attentive, but generous, in an uncommon degree. John was now in pri-

our mentions, all of them acts of benevolence, were rightly suited to insinuate that pre-eminence, and also to correct those ill notions the disciples might have conceived from their master's rigid austerities. *4thly*, The answer is expressed in words taken from the prophet Isaiah, whose writings had particularly pointed out their own master, and in which consequently they had been most conversant: "Every way," says the author, "we see the answer of our blessed Redeemer was so wisely and gracious. ly contrived, as to meet with all the prejudices and dispell all the doubts of these inquirers, and to lead them into an acknowledgment, that they had found the Messiah whom they sought; him who was to come, and were no longer to look for another." Vol. 3. page 50. The reader is here presented only with an abridgment of the discourse. The whole of it merits his perusal.

son, and every moment expecting to suffer a cruel death. Before his imprisonment his reputation had begun to decline. He was now in disgrace with Herod, and on the point of sinking into oblivion with the crowd. In this situation, the testimony of Jesus to his high merit must appear very honourable. It was in effect bringing him out to the stage of the world, and, before his final dismissal from it, demanding their applause. It was doing public homage to merit, undervalued, persecuted, and overpowered: "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" says Jesus to the crowd, "a reed shaken with the wind. What went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft raiment. But what went ye out to see? a prophet, yea more than a prophet *." No description could have been given more strong or lively, or more fully expressing dignity of personal character. It exhibits, with all the force of contrast, the firmness of his mind, and the severity of his manners; qualities by which he was distinguished from ordinary men, as

* Matth. xi. 7.

much as he was distinguished in his public character from all other prophets; being the person described by the prophets themselves as "the messenger to be sent before the face of the Lord*."

THE silence of Jesus, till the disciples of the Baptist were gone, is a circumstance in the testimony now given very observable. Their attachment to their master was unshaken: Their opinion of him required no confirmation: An encomium on his merit in their presence was unnecessary, and might have been liable to misconstruction, as if he meant to gain them by flattery. But, in addressing it to the multitude, there is an evident propriety. John had been imprisoned, and was about to suffer in prison: The force of the testimony which he had formerly given to his master, must now have been impaired by his own sufferings; nay, his sufferings would form a popular prejudice against it. It was therefore highly necessary, for ensuring the success of the testimony of John, that this prejudice should be obviated by a proper display

* Malachi iii.

of his character and office. Here Jesus with much fitness takes occasion to expose the absurdity of the objections produced against the personal character of John; objections of a different kind, but issuing from the same source with those directed against himself. Accordingly they are traced to their source, and exposed to all that scorn which they deserve, in the following spirited interrogatory: "Where-
 " unto shall I liken this generation? It is
 " like unto children sitting in the market,
 " and saying to their fellows, We have pi-
 " ped unto you, and ye have not danced.
 " We have mourned unto you, and ye
 " have not lamented. For John came
 " neither eating nor drinking, and they
 " say he hath a devil. The Son of man
 " came eating and drinking, and they say,
 " Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-
 " bibber, a friend of publicans and sin-
 " ners *."

As this interview gave Jesus a fair occasion to censure the frowardness of the age, so we find him improving it for the

* Matth. xi. 14.

purposes of alarming their unbelief, and warning them of their danger. It has been observed, that to the testimony of John, and to the evidence of his own miracles, he usually appeals. Having reproved them for an inattention to the former, by an easy transition, he passes over to the latter. An inattention to his miracles was more criminal than the other in its nature, and more hazardous in its consequences. It is therefore treated with a seriousness suited to the nature of the subject. Jesus feels the sorrowful passions of disappointment, and grief, from the experience of their insensibility, and from the foresight of their ruin: "Then," says the historian, "began he to upbraid the cities " where he had done most of his mighty " works. Wo to thee Bethsaida! Wo " to thee Chorazin! for, if the works " which were done in you had been done " in Tyre and Sidon, they would have re- " pented long ago in sackcloth and ashes*."

THESE reflections, by a beautiful transi-

* Matth. xi. 20,

tion, gave rise to others of the most agreeable kind. Jesus was no stranger to the opposition of his enemies, nor to the almost invincible hardness of their hearts: Yet, in the midst of these reflections, we behold him rejoicing in spirit, and adoring the sovereign wisdom of Providence, displayed both in the rejecting and in the receiving of his doctrine; in its rejection by the wise of the world, and in its cordial reception by others of more docile minds, from whom, except by their virtues and labours, it could derive no support: "At that time," continues the historian, "Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, "Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, I "thank thee that thou hast hid these "things from the wise and prudent, and "hast revealed them to babes. Even so, "Father, because it seemed good in thy "sight*."

THE address to the well disposed part of the audience, with which Jesus concludes, is proper and beautiful in whatever light we view it; whether as intended to distinguish such persons character-

* Mttah. xi. 25. 26.

ristically from others, as pointing out to them their duty, or as connecting and enforcing the whole preceeding discourse : " Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light *."

S E C T. II.

Of his Intercourse with Pharisees and Publicans.

THESE two sorts of men were at variance with each other; their characters were unlike, and they had almost no mutual intercourse. The former were high in the popular esteem, though no other than specious hypocrites. By the nature of their office, as well as by their reputed profligacy, the latter were much despised by the whole Jewish nation, especially by the Pharisees.

(
* Mtah. xi. 39.

JESUS appeared in the world to reconcile men not only to God, but to one another. We find him proceeding invariably on this plan, both in his private conferences and in his public intercourse with the world. In his history, we see him accepting of invitations to the houses of Pharisees, and with the same kind condescension to the houses of Publicans. The great end of all his ministrations was the reformation of mankind. But, by his intimacies of this kind, there were important and particular ends to be accomplished. It was of importance, for removing the prejudices of the Pharisees against Jesus, that he should be personally known to some of them. It was also of great importance, to make an early and open declaration, that his religion was given for the universal benefit of mankind. His intercourse with Publicans, and the docility of those persons which his intercourse with them brought to light, served as an excellent preparation for beating down the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles.

THE propriety of this conduct with respect to the Pharisees is very obvious. They were full of prejudices against him. To dislodge these, Jesus uses no methods which were not proper and honourable. The person who industriously keeps at a distance from the prejudiced, who shuns every opportunity of conversing with them, or who is always under constraint, may shew caution, but can never give that display of character which is necessary to dispel prejudice: Nay, there is some danger of his incurring the suspicion, that he is afraid to shew himself in open light. Impostors have been remarkable for their darkness and reserve. They are cautious and distrustful, except when conversing with their private associates: They avoid all particular intercourse with the inquisitive and prejudiced.

JESUS avoided not intercourse with any, even with persons the most prepossessed, and showed all that condescension which is so necessary either to conquer aversion, or to beget confidence and love. There is a seriousness, even an awfulness in public instruction, which may

produce respect for the person dispensing it, but very seldom more. Private conversation has charms peculiar to itself. It is flattering to our vanity: It puts us on an imaginary level with our monitor. We see the whole man stripped of disguise, and the native beauties of character, if he possesses them, displayed to full view*. Among barbarous, as well as polite people, eating and drinking together have been regarded as pledges of friendship. From such intercourse, all constraint is supposed to be excluded: Amiable qualities are then called forth into exercise, and are also beheld in the most advantageous light. Jesus did eat and drink with men, that he might nourish them with heavenly knowledge and virtue.

* Socrates, justly celebrated for his wisdom, chose this method of teaching philosophy. His lectures consisted of conversations on useful subjects. Men of very opposite sentiments and characters enjoyed his intimacy. At his house, and at friendly entertainments, he allowed them to put cases, and to start difficulties. In return, he talked to them with openness, and sometimes with considerable success.

WE see one of the occasions of his dining with a Pharisee distinguished by an exhibition both of the grace and divinity of his character *. It was condescending in him, who could feed thousands miraculously, to accept of a seat at a poor man's table. It was asserting a prerogative no less than divine, to forgive the sins of the penitent, and to accept of their repentance. In this character Jesus doth appear on the following occasion: " While
 " he was sitting at meat in the house of the
 " Pharisee, behold a woman in the city,
 " who was a sinner, when she knew that
 " Jesus sat at meat, brought an alabaster
 " box of ointment, and stood at his feet
 " behind him weeping, and began to
 " wash his feet with tears, and did wipe
 " them with the hairs of her head, and
 " kissed his feet, and anointed them with
 " ointment †." The least acquaintance with the manners of these ages and countries, will prevent our surprize at the manners and passions which this scene exhibits. It must be owing to ignorance, or to

* Luke xi. 36.

† V. 37. 48.

false refinement, if they are not secure against the insults of ridicule. The offence of the Pharisee, the master of the house, arose entirely from a different quarter: "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him." It appears, by the sequel, that Jesus furnished them all with the means of being convinced, that he was indeed a prophet, and more than a prophet: "He saith to the woman, Thy sins are forgiven thee, thy faith hath saved thee *." Besides, he makes use of this interview to abase the confident, and to exalt the hopes of the humble; agreeably to the spirit of the following apothegm: "Whosoever humbleth himself, shall be exalted; but he that exalteth himself, shall be abased †.

OF his intercourse with Pharisees, the history gives another specimen, and where the correction of their prejudices is evidently the object. Jesus was besought by a

* Luke xi. 48. Jesus showed, that he had the power of forgiving sins, not only by his knowledge of the hearts of men, but also by his miracles. Of this, the healing the man sick of the palsy, is an instance, Matth. ix. 2.

† Luke xviii. 14.

Pharisee to dine at his house *. With his usual frankness he accepted the invitation. By a casual neglect, or perhaps of design, he sat down without washing his hands. Out of respect to his guest, the Pharisee observed the most perfect propriety of behaviour; yet his prejudices were so strong on the side of ceremonies and traditions, that he could not avoid being offended or surprised at the omission. Of the pharisaical strictness on these points, we have the following account:

“ For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And, when they come from the market, they eat not, except they wash their hands. And many other things which they have received to hold, such as the washing of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables †.” This kind of cleanliness was no doubt commendable in itself, but absurd and superstitious when made a matter of religion, and when more at-

* Luke xi. 37.

† Mark vii. 3, 4.

tention was bestowed on it than on inward purity, or on the undisputable points of moral duty. The surprise of the Pharisee at the inattention or neglect of Jesus, the action they were engaged in, the presence and surprise of many other guests, furnished so proper an occasion of showing the folly of their mistake, that it could not escape him. With reference therefore to their mistake on this subject, and to the hypocritical cast of their general character, Jesus said, "Now, do ye Pharisees make clean the out-side of the cup and platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools! did not he that made that which is without, make that which is within also *?" In the following part of the interview, we may observe with what zeal he proceeds to rouse and alarm them. We have seen the occasion of its being excited. It was also exceedingly natural that it should increase, by the materials laid in its way, their hypocrisy, their pride, and all their other vices.

THE intercourse of Jesus with the Publicans served some ends very important

* Luke xi. 39.

to the success of his ministry. In particular, it served as a testimony against the spirit of bigotry, which characterised not only the Pharisees, but the whole nation of the Jews. Accordingly, we are told, that his intimacy with the Publicans gave them great offence; and it is not to be doubted, that the correcting or removing of the offence was intended. He not only entered into the houses of Publicans, but treated them with kindness and familiarity. Nay, out of this despised set of men, he chose one to be the companion and witness of his private life; and who was, on that account, well qualified to be the publisher of an history * peculiarly levelled against the prejudices of the Jews †, and said to have been originally written in their language.

JESUS called Matthew from the receipt of custom, and immediately accepted of an invitation to dine with him ‡. The history which this publican gives of all that passed, is very honourable for himself, and is also expressive of the modesty of his character. It is embellished with

* Matthew. † Sermon on the Mount.

‡ Matthew ix. 10.

no circumstance foreign to the subject, none which would lead us to conclude, that he had any share in this interview. Another historian * informs us, that Levi, a name by which he also was designed, made a great feast for his guest. This historian only relates, that, "as Jesus sat at meat, many publicans and "sinners came, and sat down with him." No mention is made of Scribes or Pharisees, till we are told of their coming in to censure the disciples on the score of their master's conduct. As this interview shows the pride of the Pharisees in the strongest light, it gave Jesus also an occasion to reprove and condemn it. He had in effect reproved it by sitting down with Publicans: But, by this conduct, he had incurred blame. To the scriptures, therefore, he sends them, on their knowledge of which they piqued themselves, and where, at the same time, their vices stood condemned; their insensibility, their unbelief, their unmerciful disposition, qualities bad in themselves, and wholly

* Matth. xi, 9. 10. Luke v. 29.

incompatible with the embracing of his religion : " Go," says he, " and learn what " that meaneth, I will have mercy and " not sacrifice : for I am not come to call " the righteous, but sinners to repentance*".

THIS interview occurs in one of the earliest stages of the ministry of Jesus. There is a very memorable one of the same kind, toward the conclusion of it; I mean, his interview with Zacheus. The truths which he meant to convey by his familiarity with Publicans were so important in themselves, and of such consequence to the success of his ministry, that he saw it proper the impression should be renewed. The circumstances of the present interview are finely adapted to convey these important truths to the mind.

THE interview was wholly accidental : " On the way side, as Jesus passed through " Jericho;" so that there can be no suspicion of concert in bringing it about. It happened while he was on his last journey to Jerusalem, a little before his death; a season when objects of importance irresistibly attract a good mind. On the part

• Matth. ix. 13.

of Zacheus, the interview was the result of mere curiosity, a principle of little merit in itself, but taken hold of, on this occasion, for want of a better, and producing weighty consequences: He "sought to see Jesus who he was, and could not for the press; for he was of little stature. And he ran before, and climbed a sycomore tree to see him; for he was to pass that way *." In this conspicuous posture, he became an object of the attention of Jesus, and soon after of his mercy: "When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and saw him, and said unto him, Zacheus, make haste and come down, for to day I must abide at thy house †." The condition of Zacheus, a chief man among the Publicans and rich, the haste which he made to welcome his guest, the cordiality of the reception, the respectfulness of his address, his application to Jesus as one who knew the secrets of his life, and the integrity of his professions, are circumstances which distinguish him, not only from the Pharisees, but

* Luke xix. 3. 4.

† V. 5.

from the gazing multitude of spectators, and prepare us for listening with pleasure to that honourable testimony which then proceeded from the mouth of Jesus: "This day is salvation come to this house; forasmuch as he also is the Son of Abraham *," by the clearness of his faith, and by the cheerfulness of his obedience; and therefore deservedly placed on a level with the descendants of the Patriarch: A testimony which, though not so strongly expressed, must recall to our memory another, to which, in many of the circumstances, it bears a great similarity, contained in the words of Jesus to the Roman Centurion: "Verily, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel; and many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into utter darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth †."

* Luke xix. 9.

† Matth. viii. 10. 11. 12.

S E C T. III.

Of respectful Applications made to him.

It appears from almost every page of the history of Jesus, that he was unwearyed in his labours for the good of mankind. This inference we must unavoidably make from attending to the subject of the former section. In this section we are called upon to observe and admire the candour with which he proceeded in attaching men to him, when their dispositions in his favour were most forward and promising. Such conduct we would admire on its own account ; but here it has a peculiar grace, being characteristical of him who always declared that his kingdom was not of this world.

WHEN we behold the scribe coming and saying to him, " Master, I will follow thee, " whithersoever thou goest * ;" another disciple saying to him, " Lord, suffer me " first to go and bury my father † ;" and

* Matth. viii. 19.

† Verse 21.

another, "Let me first go and bid farewell
 "to them which are at home *;" we are
 perhaps surprized at the forbidding man-
 ner in which he received these respectful
 advances. Can it be said that he exhibit-
 ed his wonted zeal, in seizing occasions of
 doing good, and even in searching out for
 them? Was it in this manner that his re-
 ligion, or indeed any religion, could gain
 upon the hearts of men, by showing it to
 be almost incompatible with the interests
 and attachments of this world? But if
 we reflect a little with coolness, our sur-
 prize will vanish away, and other senti-
 ments will succeed in its place.

It is not to be doubted, that Jesus, by
 his conduct on these occasions, intended
 to rectify or remove the popular mistake
 about the nature of his kingdom. The
 Jews expected a temporal kingdom; the
 disciples themselves were seized with the
 pleasing delusion; insomuch that neither
 the instructions, the death, nor resurrec-
 tion of their master were able to undeceive
 them. The persons who on this occasion

* Luke ix. 6.

made Jesus an offer of their services were induced to do so from the erroneous apprehension of gaining and securing to themselves all kinds of worldly advantages. It was therefore honourable to undeceive them, and merciful to do it in the gentlest manner. This is finely executed in the following pathetic reply to one of these forward disciples: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not whereon to lay his head *." To reason with men almost immersed in matter, on the excellency of a spiritual religion, would have been as improper as it is to exhibit the sweetest harmony to the deaf, or the finest colours to the blind. He therefore chose to present his religion in its plainest garb, and to oppose his own situation to the popular prejudices, in order to correct them. The discovery no doubt was mortifying; on which account it was of the greater importance to prevent a deception. Impostors, in propagating their tenets, must

* Mark x. 17.

necessarily have recourse to the methods of violence or deceit. If an opportunity of gaining profelytes be fairly offered, they will on no account let it slip. They will bring down their terms, as low as possible, and industriously level them to the prejudices or passions of those whom they mean to ensnare. The opportunities at this time presented to Jesus were as favourable as any person could desire. No art, no industry was requisite to procure the attachment of these respectful votaries. His silence alone would have effected it. But this expedient he throws aside, and unfolds his real plan without artifice or disguise.

NOTHING can do more hurt to any opinion or system of opinions, than the levity and inconstancy of the persons who embrace them. Against this evil we see Jesus also providing. It was an evil which, from his knowledge of the heart of man, he must have foreseen. In the apostolic age there were some "who made shipwreck of the faith," no doubt to the great offence or discouragement of others. In the

progress of his own ministry, some of the disciples fell back. Perhaps he saw the levity of these persons who were now making protestations of attachment and fidelity. His accepting, or even encouraging, their advances, when imagined interest, love of novelty, or vanity, were the prompters, was a measure which could be of no advantage to them, and could reflect no honour on his religion. To repress the ardour of the multitude on a subsequent occasion, he talked to them still more plainly, illustrating what he said from the supposed cases of the tower-builder, and of the king going out to war *. By his conduct on this occasion, which is quite similar, he consulted both the credit and success of his ministry : " No man that putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back again, is fit for the kingdom of heaven †."

IN the more advanced stages of the ministry of Jesus, we see the like respectful

* Luke xiv. 29.—32.

† Luke ix. 62.

applications made, and the same conduct on his part uniformly observed. The most remarkable instance is that of the young ruler who applied to him concerning the way to eternal life *; it gave him a fair opportunity of unfolding the maxims by which he chose to establish his religion in the world.

THE first circumstance observable is the subject of the application; a point indeed of the highest consequence to be well informed of. We are told of applications made to Jesus, and questions proposed, with a design to ensnare him. But from the manner, as well as from the matter of the ruler's application, it is clear that it issued from the serious ardour of his mind, from the most respectful sentiments of his guide, and from an entire confidence in his skill to direct him: "He came running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, saying, Good master, what shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life †?" It is evident, that he regarded Jesus as

* Mark x. 17.

† Ibid.

a divine teacher, which was one great step towards his becoming a disciple. The rank and character of the person are circumstances not to be overlooked. His riches were great; his station in life respectable; his conduct blameless; his character amiable in the eyes of him who knew the hearts of men; for Jesus loved him; in short, he had here a disciple of whom, to all appearance, he was likely to have credit. But in what manner did he proceed with this promising young man? Did he discover an inclination to gain him on any terms, or to cheapen his terms in order to secure him? By no means: He loved him for what was lovely; but he knew his weak side, and resolved to touch him there, on purpose to bring him to the knowledge of himself, one of the first lessons of wisdom; and so to qualify him to be a steady disciple. As soon therefore as he was addressed on the subject of his great riches, and his attachment to them *, he went away for-

* Mark x. 21. This command to sell all, and give to the poor, and to take up the cross, must refer to the community of goods and persecutions in the primitive times.

rowful; nor are we told what became of him, whether he gave over all thoughts of embracing a system so cross to his worldly pursuits, or whether, on mature reflection, he actually did embrace it. Whatever was the issue with respect to him, the conduct of Jesus on this occasion is distinguished by its propriety and dignity. We see him in all his intercourse with the world uniformly consulting not only the success, but the honour and credit of his religion.

S E C T. IV.

Of insnaring Applications.

AMONG the occasions presented to Jesus for promoting the great ends of his ministry, those make a considerable figure which took their rise from the wiles of his enemies. The opposition formed against him, its causes and effects, will naturally come to be considered afterwards. At present, let it suffice to observe, that, after many fruitless attempts to seize his person, they had recourse to the mean ar-

tifice of "entangling him in his talk," as the historian expresses it *. A resource equally unsuccessful with the former, terminating in their own confusion, and in displaying the superior skill of their antagonist.

WHEN, on this occasion, the Herodians, Sadducees, and Pharisees approach Jesus, we expect the issue of the encounter with impatience and attention. We do not immediately conclude, that he will wait their advances, and indulge them with an interview. He knew the bottom of their hearts, and could be no stranger to their artifices. He had refused to give any reply to the chief priests and elders, when questioned on the subject of his authority †; and afterwards neither the importunities, nor the threatenings of Pilate could have any effect. But here his conduct was as different as the circumstances in which he was placed. By miracles his authority had been fully attested. When he appeared before his judge, the hour of suffering was come.

* Matth. xxii. 15.

† Matth. xxi. 27.

But, at the time of which we now speak, his ministry was in its progress, and hastening towards the close, a fit season for the most vigorous exertions. The occasions now offered were also very fit for this end: and we see Jesus making use of them in a perfect consistence with the wonted dignity of his conduct. There were three successive applications made, each of which will deserve a separate consideration.

THE first insnaring application was made on the subject of civil politics *, a subject which almost never fails to inflame the passions of men. Here the national circumstances of the Jews must not be left out of view. As a nation, they were proud of an imaginary independence; at the same time they were the subjects of Cæsar. According as the former or the latter of these ideas possessed their minds, they took a side. The idea of independence was the most pleasing and popular of the two. Hence the body of the people were in their

* Matth. xxii. 17. Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not ?

hearts the enemies of Cæsar; they paid him their tribute, but did it more from fear than from a sense of duty. Others were forward in expressing their loyalty, and in courting the favour of their new master. The lawfulness of paying him tribute was therefore a point of nice discussion; it was surrounded with snares, which seemed to be almost unavoidable. On one side, lay all the strength of national prejudice; on the other, the resentment of a mighty emperor. It is probable that the enemies of Jesus were prompted to bring him into this latter snare, by their jealousy of his influence on the minds of the multitude. Perhaps they knew that the multitude would have made him a king, and that his followers expected the immediate establishment of a temporal kingdom.

The manner of the application is not less insnaring than the matter of it. The Pharisees were the chief actors, but they stood behind the curtain. They send out some of their number in the disguise of scholars, "spies feigning themselves to

“be just men *,” to propose the question: These are accompanied with the Herodians, the flatterers of power, and public informers: “Master,” say they, “We know “that thou art true, and teachest the way “of God in truth; neither carest thou for “any man, for thou regardest not the person of man. Tell us therefore, What “thinkest thou †?” Jesus at once silences, reproves, and instructs them.

It appears from the history of his life, of his death, and of the establishment of his religion, that Christianity was often misrepresented as unfavourable to civil government. Jesus, whose religion is wholly spiritual, was under no necessity of giving the world a system of government. Attentive to the higher interests of men, he left them to their own wisdom in the affairs of this world. But as an occasion for taking off the objection was now fairly offered, with much wisdom he embraced it. It was of great importance to unveil the hypocrisy of these inquirers. It was of importance to give a testimony a-

* Matth. xxii. 16. 17.

† Luke xx. 20.

gainst that seditious spirit which was soon to issue in their ruin ; and in the mean time, from this very mark of subjection, " the paying of tribute," to persuade them, that the period was arrived when, according to the prediction of the founder of their nation *, the Messiah should come. With the most perfect ease, Jesus not only disengaged himself from the snare, but overpowered his enemies ; and it is probable that they felt something beyond the mortification of an ordinary disappointment, when " they marvelled at his doctrine, and left him, and went their way †."

THE next application of this kind took its rise from a different set of men, and was made on a subject extremely different. These persons were the Sadducees ; and the subject on which they apply, desiring to have a difficulty solved, was the resurrection. We can have no scruple in believing that the application was insna-

* The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, till Shiloh come, Gen. xlix. 10.

† Matth xxii. 22.

ring. They denied the resurrection, and had no desire to be convinced. But, knowing that Jesus had silenced the Pharisees on one nice subject, they attempt in their turn to puzzle him in another. It is not to be doubted, that they were confident of success. Besides their unbelieving turn *, which often gives an edge to wit, they were professedly men of pleasure, enemies on that account to refinements in religious speculation, and having an interest in exposing them to ridicule. With an appearance of gravity, which gives wit its highest seasoning, they immediately propose a case, and require a solution. That the case might be liable to no suspicion, it is taken from the law of Moses, the authority of which they allowed. The ridicule was directed against the conclusion from the case, supposing the resurrection to be true; and for a moment they suppose it to be true, on purpose to make the conclusion appear ridiculous: "Master, Moses said, If a man die, having

* Acts xxiii. 8. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit.

“ no children, his brother shall marry his
 “ wife, and raise up seed to his brother.
 “ Now, there were with us seven brethren,
 “ and the first, when he had married a
 “ wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left
 “ his wife unto his brother. Likewise
 “ the second, also the third, unto the
 “ seventh. And, last of all, the woman died
 “ also. Therefore in the resurrection,
 “ whose wife shall she be of the seven,
 “ for they all had her * ?”

JESUS, in the reply, not only turns off
 the point of the ridicule aimed against
 him, but proceeds to turn it against them-
 selves, and then to give some opening in-
 to this capital truth of his religion, a ge-
 neral resurrection. The institution of
 marriage belongs to the present state of
 humanity. To infer from thence, that, if
 there be a future state of being, or if there
 be higher orders of beings, they must
 necessarily subsist by the same order, and
 cannot subsist by any other ; what conclu-
 sion more absurd or ridiculous ? Yet it is
 the very absurdity of which the Sadducees

* Matth. xxii. 24.

on this occasion stand convicted: "Jesus,
 " answering, said to them, The children of
 " this world marry, and are given in mar-
 " riage: But they which shall be account-
 " ed worthy to obtain that world, and the
 " resurrection from the dead, neither mar-
 " ry, nor are given in marriage; neither can
 " they die any more; for they are equal
 " to the angels, and are children of
 " God *."

JESUS doth not satisfy himself with ex-
 posing the absurdity of the argument
 brought against this doctrine. He takes hold
 of the present, as the fittest occasion, for lay-
 ing open its foundations. He had already
 done this at the grave of Lazarus, when he
 called him forth to life. The occasion re-
 quired an argument of that nature:
 " Could not this man, who opened the
 " eyes of the blind, have caused that even
 " this man should not have died †?" But,
 as on the present occasion, they employ all
 the speciousness of wit, and all the parade

* Matth. xxii. 30. compared with Luke xx. 34.

† John xi. 37.

of sophistry, sound reasoning was the weapon fittest to be opposed. The arguments from the power of God, and from the books of Moses, are therefore produced with the highest propriety: The former being irresistible, as a dictate of natural religion; the other, as a dictate of revealed. How the inquirers were affected, we are not told: "But the multitudes, "when they heard these things, were astonished at his doctrine *."

"When the Pharisees," says Matthew, "heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together †," to insnare him on some other point. One of their number, a lawyer, proposes a point of law, and requires a decision: "Master, which is the greatest commandment ‡?" They were guilty of gross partiality in explaining the law, either by giving a preference where none was intended, or by swelling that preference beyond all bounds. It is probable, as they came to Jesus, "tempting him," that they meant to draw a decision from him on the pre-

* Matth. xxii. 33. † Verse 34. ‡ Verse 35.

sent subject, contrary to popular prejudice, in order to lessen his reputation as a teacher, and to expose him to censure. Whatever were their views, his conduct is beautiful. Having mentioned the first and great commandment, which had then become the victim of superstition, he immediately subjoins the second: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself *;" a command which was almost become obsolete, at least which was greatly disfigured by pride and selfishness. Another historian † tells us, that the lawyer, "willing to justify himself, said, Who is my neighbour?" Probably he felt himself distressed by the last clause of the decision, or wished to excuse himself from understanding it in its full extent. In the view therefore of enlarging his mind, and of preparing him for that union among men in which all names and distinctions would be lost, Jesus resolves the difficulty at once, not by strength of reasoning, though the subject could easily allow it, but by introducing the affecting

* Matth. xxii. 39.

† Luke x. 29.

story of the wounded traveller, who was relieved by the kind offices of the Samaritan *.

S E C T. V.

Questions of Curiosity put to him.

THE appearance of Jesus in the character of a divine teacher, excited universal attention; in consequence of this, applications were made to him of every kind, and from almost every motive. Some persons were prompted by respect,

* Luke x. 30. These insidious applications of the enemies of Jesus will naturally recal to the mind of the learned reader similar passages in the history of Socrates, one of the most virtuous Heathens that ever appeared in the character of a reformer; beset all his life with vain pretenders to wisdom, exposed to their wiles, and at length falling a victim to their rage, but not till, by his wisdom, he had erected to himself an indelible monument in the hearts of his citizens, and had been declared by oracles to be the wisest of men; an encomium which none will disparage, who attend to the modesty of his wisdom, and to the strength of his desire after more perfect discoveries.

some by malice, others by curiosity. The latter of these, as a principle of action, is, strictly speaking, neither good nor bad, but is commonly looked upon as contemptible, except when it derives dignity from the objects about which it is employed.

JESUS appeared in the world for more noble purposes than to gratify any vain curiosity. We would not think this compatible with the dignity of his character. He descended to gratify the world in all points which were important for them to know. As to matters of fruitless inquiry, they derived no light from his public discourses; and in particular instances, wherever the symptoms of curiosity appeared, he either chose to mortify it, or give it some new and noble direction. In attending to the history, we find questions of curiosity proposed by almost every kind of persons with whom Jesus had intercourse; by the multitude, by the Pharisees, and by the chosen disciples.

As he was passing through the villages of Judea, in an advanced period of his ministry *, "One said to him, Lord, are there few that be saved?" A question of

* Luke xiii. 23.

serious concern, if properly considered; but proposed evidently on this occasion to gratify an inquisitive humour. In his progress through the country, Jesus was attended perhaps only by the twelve; and, though sometimes followed by multitudes, yet their attendance was precarious and occasional. The Jews were taught by their Rabbins, that every son of Israel would certainly have an inheritance in the future state; probably deceived, or willing to be deceived, by a plausible, but deceitful analogy, the settlement of their tribes in the land of Canaan. The sight of one, declaring himself to be the guide of men to happiness, so poorly attended, and having so few attached to him, very probably excited that curiosity which gave rise to the question. It will be found that the passion of curiosity in matters of religion, may be sometimes criminal, and is always unfavourable to vigorous exertion in the practice of it. The present was an inquiry at once presumptuous and trifling, and, as appears from the sequel of the inter-

* John xxi. 21. 22. Acts i. 6 7th.

view, declared to be dangerous in its consequences.

JESUS doth not directly find fault with the inquirer, as he often did with his own apostles in similar circumstances; far less doth he gratify him, but calls off his attention, and the attention of all present, from this subject, to others of serious consequence; the necessity of exerting the most strenuous endeavours in order to be saved, and the great danger of men deceiving themselves on the subject: "Strive to enter in
"at the strait gate; for many, I say unto
"you, will seek to enter in, and shall not
"be able *." A reflection justified by attending to the general conduct of mankind. It has been already observed, that the Jews were taught to value themselves on an exclusive privilege to the kingdom of heaven. On this occasion Jesus proceeds to undeceive them of their mistake, by an express declaration to the contrary, in favour of the despised heathen world; having first laid open the sources of the mistake, and traced it thro'

* Luke xiii. 14.

its consequences: "There are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last *."

IN these questions of curiosity we find the Pharisees also engaged: "Master, we would have a sign from thee †," was sometimes their language, though Jesus had wrought many miracles in their presence. He therefore refused to gratify them by an immediate exertion of his power, or by any of those visible effects which their insatiable curiosity was demanding. On such occasions, they are commonly reprehended for not improving the means of conviction with which they were already favoured; or an opportunity is taken to strike at the root of some dangerous mistake.

ON one occasion, we are told, "the Pharisees demanded of him, When the kingdom of God should come ‡?" By the kingdom of God, they and all the Jews understood the coming of the Messiah; and, by the coming of that kingdom, the splendour with which it was expected to ap-

* Luke xxx. † Matth. xii. 38. ‡ Luke xvii. 20.

pear. The question therefore was not only a matter of curiosity, but in effect a defiance to the truth of his pretensions, and an insult on the humility of his external appearance. Instead of gratifying their curiosity, Jesus proceeds to remove their original prejudice against his person and religion; the delusive expectations of a temporal kingdom: A prejudice which proved fatal to the Jews in that age, and which still detains them in the fetters of infidelity. He explains himself on the subject of his kingdom, and tacitely censures them for their levity and inattention. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation;" with outward show, "neither shall they say, Lo here, or, lo, there: For behold, the kingdom of God is within you," among you*; a kingdom described by the prophets, testified of by the Baptist, delineated by the doctrine of Jesus himself, and adorned by his miracles. Here he gives his own disciples some seasonable hints on the subject of his rejection by the Jews, and on

* Luke xviii. 20th, 21.

the sudden vengeance to be poured down on that disobedient people *.

THE explicate mention of this subject, in presence of the disciples, towards the close of his ministry, put their curiosity to a severe trial. Any kind of revolution in the Jewish state must have been very interesting to them, either as a national concern, or as standing connected with their own interests, whatever we suppose them to have been, and with the interests of their master. Jesus foretold the destruction of the temple in such terms as would alarm both their hopes and their fears, as well as convince them of the certainty of the event: "One stone shall not be left standing above another †." The disciples are represented as acting with the most perfect decorum: They are silent for the present, and suspend their inquiries till they have a fit opportunity. The Mount of Olives was a place to which Jesus often retreated from the crowd. There "they come to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when shall these things be?

* Luke 22. to 37th.

† Matth. xxiv. 2.

"and what shall be the signs of thy coming, and of the end of the world? *"

Every person acquainted with the peculiar sentiments of the Jews must know, that they looked on the dissolution of their polity as the end of the world, or more properly speaking, as the end or consummation of that age of the world. But this subject will more properly find a place in some of the following chapters, where we begin to lose sight of the croud, and see the attention of Jesus more confined to his chosen disciples. It is now time to consider the figure which they make, and the part which they sustain through his public ministry.

* Matth. xxiv. 3.

C H A P. VIII.

Of the Apostles during his public Ministry.

IN this history, Jesus himself, on all occasions, sustains the principal character, with much lustre and dignity. His apostles hold the place of under-characters: They are always bearing a part in every material transaction, and were originally taken into the society of their master, that they might be qualified to carry on his plan for the good of mankind.

THEIR figure is considerable; not from splendor of station, nor from strength of natural endowments; but from being the companions and partners of the ministry of Jesus. IN this respectable character, they fall under our present observation; where it will be proper to take notice of the particular instructions which they received from their master; their own character and conduct, which, in some instances, will surprize us; and then the methods which he employed to form their minds, and to prepare them for a more extensive discharge of their office.

S E C T. I.

Of the Instructions which he gave them respecting their Office.

THE personal character of the apostles of Jesus, as well as their public character, made it highly expedient that they should be furnished with instructions, and that these instructions should be full and particular: "He ordained them that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach the gospel*." They were but lately taken from the management of their nets, and knew little besides. Hence their ministry could derive none of that lustre which superiority either in rank or ability usually bestows. Jesus knew well how to supply the defect. He did so by his instructions, and also by arming them with the power of working miracles.

It must be allowed that without miracles neither their intimacy with Jesus, nor

* Mark iii. 14.

the fulness and clearness of their instructions, could have given their message to the world its proper weight. But, accompanied and supported by the power of working miracles, it was well fitted to rouse attention, and to command respect. When Jesus called his twelve disciples, he began with "giving them power over "unclean spirits, to cast them out, and "to heal all manner of sickness and all "manner of disease *." These powers stand in the front of their instructions, and the exercise of them is afterwards enjoined as a part of their duty †. The miracles which he commands them to work, are of the same stamp with his own, expressive of that grace which is the distinguishing characteristic of his religion, and of that omnipotent power from which they were to derive support. Let us now attend to the instructions which they received to qualify them for bearing a part in the ministry of their master.

One memorable circumstance introduces the whole : "Go not into the way of "the Gentiles, and into any city of the

* Matth. x. 1.

† Verse 5. & 6.

“Samaritans, enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel *.” It is easy to conceive how such an order, limiting their instructions, must have affected us, had Jesus never said more on the subject. We must have judged it, considered apart, as incompatible with his extensive plan for the happiness of mankind. But, viewed in its full light, it is just and proportioned.

EVERY great work of nature or of art is observed to rise by steps towards perfection: It may be unpromising in its beginning, yet nevertheless great in its progress and completion. Jesus seems to have followed this analogy, both in establishing his religion, and in giving his apostles their instructions. At first they are limited by very narrow boundaries, but in a little, the instructions extend in the same proportion, and by the same steps, with the plan to whose completion they are subservient: “Ye shall be witnesses to me,” says Jesus after his resurrection, “both in Jerusalem, and in all

* Matth. x. 5. 6.

“Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the
“uttermoſt parts of the earth *.”

A learned critic on the ſcriptures has obſerved, that in theſe limited inſtructions with which the apoſtles are required to ſet out, there is a reſpect had to what he calls the nobility of the Jews †. They were the deſcendants of Abraham, who was diſtinguiſhed by his perſonal character, and by promiſes made him in behalf of his poſterity. In virtue of theſe promiſes, they became a diſtinguiſhed people in Egypt, in the wilderneſs, and in the land of Canaan. It had been alſo promiſed and foretold, that among them the Meſſiah ſhould appear. On many accounts, they were a nation great beyond any other nation. It was therefore quite agreeable to a plan of Providence, hitherto unvaried, that the Jews ſhould have the firſt offer of the goſpel. The apoſtles, after the aſcenſion of their maſter, acted uniformly according to this inſtruc-

* Acts i. 8.

† Grotius.

tion *. In the spirit of it, Jesus always acted himself, and on some occasions avowed his doing so; as in his reply to the woman of Canaan: "I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel †."

THE Jews had been long in the habit of regarding themselves as the sole favourites of heaven, and all other persons as outcasts. The prejudice was so strong, that after the gospel had been offered to them, and had been rejected, they were greatly offended at the apostles for turning off to the Gentiles. Their offence at Peter for going to Cornelius, his own scruples about engaging in that service, and their persecutions of Paul, are instances to the same purpose. Hence we see what must have been the consequence, if, without any preparation of events, the first instructions given to the apostles had included the Gentile world. The propriety of not including the Samaritans was still greater. Betwixt the Jews and them there subsisted an implacable enmity, on account of religious differences, to the ex-

* Acts passim.
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† Matth. xv. 24.
H

clusion of all mutual intercourse, and, on the side of the Jews, even of the common acts and intercourses of humanity *.

THE next circumstance which occurs in the instructions of the apostles, is the subject of them: "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand †." Jesus, on this occasion, acted on the plan with which he set out in his own ministry. He chose to enter on the great stage of the world, introduced by the appearance and preparation of the Baptist. But the labours of John were now at an end. His testimony would soon lose its influence, supported only by a few dispirited votaries. In this critical period, Jesus sent forth the twelve, as his harbingers to prepare his way. Their office and their message were in effect the same, and expressed in almost the same words with that of the Baptist. Though Jesus had made his appearance, the Jews were still expecting the Messiah. They did not believe that this was he who should come, and were looking for another; one whose

* John iv.

† Matth. x. 7.

kingdom would outshine in splendor all the kingdoms of the world. It was therefore kind to direct and confine their attention to that heavenly kingdom which God was now about to establish.

ANOTHER circumstance very observable in the instructions of the apostles, is the gratuitous manner in which they are enjoined to dispense their ministrations: "Freely ye have received, freely give *." Jesus describes the Jewish teachers, his own cotemporaries, by the following character: "Which devour widows houses, and for a shew make long prayers."

OF the same character were the persons who afterwards sprang up in the apostolic age, "teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake †." Such had been the sophists with whom Socrates conversed, and of whose conduct he disapproved by his own uniform practice. Thus the world stood with respect to their instructors. Jesus chose to send out his apostles on a different plan, in order to dignify both their per-

* Matth. x. 8.

† Titus i. 11.

sons and their message. It was of importance for some to have no stumbling-block laid in the way of their receiving a religion so cross to their prejudices, and for all to observe the disinterestedness of the undertaking. The apostles, by their miraculous power of healing, had access not only to the senses, but to the hearts of men; and the miracles themselves were such favours, that men have been willing to procure them at the most expensive rate.

It was an ancient custom, when consulting a prophet, or receiving a favour from him, to offer a present. So early as the period preceeding the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan, we see the elders of Moab and Median coming to Balaam, and bringing in their hands the rewards of divination *. Saul, when seeking his father's asses, scrupled to consult Samuel, because he had no fit present to make him †. The wife of Jeroboam came to Ahijah loaded with presents, to know the issue of the distress of her child ‡. As did

* Numb. xxii. 7.

† 1 Sam. ix. 7.

‡ 1 Kings xiv. 1—3.

Naaman the Syrian, when he came to Elisha, to be cured of his leprosy *. In all these instances, where the presents were offered, they were nobly refused.

AT the time when Jesus gave his apostles their instructions, it is difficult to say, if the like generosity could have taken place either in giving or receiving. On one hand, the lower classes of men were the ordinary subjects of the ministrations of the apostles. On the other hand, the apostles were poor; they had forsaken all to follow their master. The corruptions of the times, the subject of the message, and the external condition of the messengers, are circumstances which determine the conduct of Jesus, on this occasion, to be highly just and proper. Accordingly, we have the best reasons to conclude, that the disinterestedness of the first teachers of Christianity co-operated greatly with the miraculous powers in favour of their doctrine. To their disinterestedness they appeal at the very time when they plead their reasonable privilege,

* 2 Kings v. 5.

“That they who serve at the altar, should
“live by the altar*.”

FROM the above circumstance, the apostles might naturally conclude, that it was necessary for them to be well furnished for their progress. In this particular Jesus undeceives them : “ Provide neither
“gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither
“two coats, nor yet staves, for the work-
“man is worthy of his meat †.” An article in their instructions which conveys to us the just notion of their present ministry ; a short and circumscribed one in comparison with that in which they were to be engaged afterwards. Besides, it ought not to escape us, that this instruction was peculiarly fitted to inspire the apostles with the firm persuasion, that Providence was greatly interested in their behalf. Thus lived their ancestors in the wilderness ; their raiment waxed not old upon them, nor the shoe waxed old upon their foot ; and without harvest or vin-

* 1 Cor. ix. 13.

† Matth. x.

tage they were liberally supplied with food.

THE last particular in the instructions refers to the manner in which the apostles are required to deliver their message, and their conduct in consequence of being well or ill received. They are commanded to enter into every town, and every city in their way, to deliver their message to all, but to attach themselves only to a few worthy of the favour; to leave a blessing with those who should receive, and a testimony against those who should reject, the message. It has been observed, that the commission now given to the apostles was circumscribed both as to its extent and continuance. Their ministry was strictly of the probationary kind. It put to trial how the Jews stood affected to the gospel; it gave the apostles an opportunity of seeing this; and consequently served to strengthen them against the prejudice of a national unbelief.

THE conduct to which the apostles are directed, was excellently fitted to procure respect to their persons and message.

THE ancient prophets had been commanded, in the name of God, to bless an obedient people, and to threaten the disobedient with destruction. The signs now given were not precisely the same; but they were similar in meaning, and in effect contained a declaration to all, whether they would hear, or whether they would forbear, that "there had been a prophet among them *."

ONE historian † informs us, that besides the twelve apostles, Jesus sent out seventy of his disciples on the same errand, and invested them with the same powers. The apostles had been instructed to proceed with dispatch; and there seemed to be a necessity for it, as the ministry of their master was to be of short duration. Besides this, he had chosen them to be the stated companions and witnesses of his

* Ezeck. ii. 5. The shaking off the dust from their feet is very significant of one of these purposes; and it is well known, that to wish peace to another was, among the Jews, the usual form of salutation.

† Luke.

life. It is therefore probable, that after a very few journeyings through Judea, their labours of this kind ceased, and the seventy were chosen to supply their place. It has been often observed, that this last deputation has a reference to the numbers which constituted the Great Council, as the other plainly refers to the number of the Tribes of Israel.

S E C T. II.

Of the Figure which they make during this Period.

IN consequence of the instructions which the apostles received, we naturally expect to meet with some accounts of their conduct in fulfilling them, and of the success which attended their labours. But this is a subject almost passed over in silence by the historians. Two of them were apostles, consequently had some share in the transactions: We easily excuse their silence, or we approve it as proper.

Luke, who was not of this number, with much simplicity relates, that the apostles, on receiving their instructions, “ departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where*.” Mark is a little more particular as to the subject of their preaching, and the nature of their miracles : “ They went out and preached, that men should repent; and they cast out many devils, and they anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them †.” Both historians agree in relating the transactions in which the apostles bear a part, without ornament or parade. They say no more than what is necessary to satisfy us, that the apostles obeyed the instructions of their master; that they appeared as his heralds in the cities and towns of Judea, and gave a specimen of the character which afterwards they were called to sustain; that of the authorized instructors of mankind.

IN a former chapter ‡, I made some observations on the personal character of the apostles of Jesus, in order to illustrate

* Luke ix. 6. † Mark vi. 12. ‡ Chap. iv.

the fitness of his conduct in chusing them. It is now proposed to take a view of their behaviour, while they were the companions and partners of his ministry.

I have no doubt, that many defenders of the Christian cause would rather chuse to throw a veil over this part of the gospel-history. It is a fact too obvious to admit of debate, that the conduct of the apostles during the life of their master was not distinguished either by its dignity or propriety. On the contrary, the occasions are very rare, when their behaviour is not strongly marked with weakness or imprudence. It is almost enough to observe, in apology, that the improprieties with which they are chargeable naturally and unavoidably issued either from their slow, or from their mistaken apprehensions. Any person acquainted with the history must observe, that the apostles were remarkably slow in apprehending the force, and sometimes the obvious meaning both of the doctrines and the miracles of Jesus.

ON several occasions, we see them puzzled by his doctrines, on subjects which to us appear plain and obvious. The Pha-

Pharisees had blamed him for allowing his disciples to eat bread with unwashed hands *. This allowance, it would seem, was constructed as disrespectful to their traditions. Addressing himself to the multitude, Jesus makes the following defence: "Not that which goeth in at the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man †." The Pharisees understood, and were offended at this saying. Yet to Peter, the most lively of the apostles, it was a parable; and therefore he applies to his master for an explication ‡. The doctrine was preached to the crowd; on this account it is not to be supposed that it was either intricate or refined.

THE slowness of the apostles is equally observable on occasion of the private discourses of Jesus particularly addressed to them, and on subjects extremely interesting, his absence and sufferings. For these trying events he endeavours to prepare their minds by the following dis-

* Matth. xv. 2 † Verse 11 ‡ Matth. xv. 15.

coveries: "In my Father's house are many
 "mansions. I go to prepare a place for
 "you. And whither I go ye know, and
 "the way ye know;" Thomas saith to him,
 "We know not whither thou goest, and
 "how can we know the way*?" Again,
 when mentioning the clear discoveries
 given of God under the gospel-dispen-
 sation in the following terms, "From hence-
 "forth ye know him, and have seen him.
 "Philip saith to him, Lord, shew us the
 "Father, and it sufficeth us†." To this se-
 cond question Jesus with some ardour re-
 plies: "Have I been so long with you, and
 "hast thou not known me? Verily, I say
 "unto you, He that hath seen me, hath
 "seen the Father also: How sayest thou
 "then, Shew us the Father‡?"

EQUALLY observable is their slowness in
 discerning the intention of the miracles of
 Jesus. After experiencing in them repeated
 proofs of his power and goodness, they
 discover on many occasions a criminal dis-
 trust of both. In the course of his introduc-

* John xiv. 2. 4. 5. † Verse 7. 8. ‡ Verse 9.

tory ministrations, he had wrought some miracles: One of the historians calls it "a manifesting his glory," in consequence of which his disciples "believed in him*." But it appears from their conduct, that the impressions had not been deep, or were quickly effaced. The miracle of his calming the storm at sea, was wrought soon after the commencement, and again repeated in the progress of his ministry †. No miracles could be better fitted to convince the apostles of his tender concern about them, and of his ability to relieve them when in the most distressful circumstances. But on both occasions of this kind, we see them fearful and unbelieving. On the latter occasion, even after the wind ceased, "they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered; "for they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened ‡."

THIS miracle of the loaves illustrates not only the unceasing attention of Jesus to the stability of his apostles, but

* John ii. 11.

† Matth. viii. 24. 14. 23.

‡ Mark vi. 51. 52.

the importance of their having a succession of miracles to revive the impressions of former ones. John informs us, that when Jesus passed over into Galilee, "a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased*." When he saw them coming to him, he saith to Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? (And this he said to prove him, for he knew himself what he would do) Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here which hath five barley-loaves, and two small fishes; but what are these among so many?" Without any reply, "Jesus said, Make the men sit down." Accordingly they sat down, "and were fed," in number "about five thousand†."

THIS miracle, though great in its nature, and fitted to convince, yet seems to

* John vi. 2.

† Verse 5—10.

have made a very feeble impression. After a second miracle of this kind, the disciples expose themselves to the following piercing rebuke : " O ye of little faith, " why do ye thus reason among yourselves, because ye have brought no " bread ? Do ye not understand, neither " remember the five loaves of the five " thousand, and how many baskets ye " took up ? Neither the seven loaves of " the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up * ?" The miracle of raising Lazarus, as has been observed, seems evidently to have had the slowness of the disciples for an object. Jesus having told them of the death of Lazarus, immediately subjoins a reflection which must surprise us at a first reading : " I am glad " for your sakes that I was not there, to " the intent that ye may believe †."

Is it necessary to offer an apology for the incapacity of the apostles ? Doth it lead us into conclusions to the disadvantage of their character, as men of integrity ? Quite the reverse. In common life, peculiarities of charac-

* Matth. xv. 6. † John xi. 15.

ter, though implying defects, are often amiable. But there is no necessity for refining in the present case. The original incapacity of the apostles forms a strong presumption in favour of the cause which they supported. Had it been the cause of deceit, they were the most unfit persons for carrying it on with success: Their slowness of apprehending, their want of reach and design, would have for ever excluded them from the confidence of an impostor.

BUT the apostles were also men of mistaken apprehensions. Hence, the weakness of their conduct had the wider range. A slow person must often fall into improprieties, which others of quick discernment can easily avoid: Such a person also is not without great difficulty convinced of his mistake. If we suppose that the apostles were prepossessed in favour of a temporal Messiah, our surprise at some parts of their conduct will entirely cease. This mistake, and nothing else, inspired them with the passions of envy and ambition, which so often sully their character, and

as often expose them to the reprehension of Jesus. Peter was an apostle distinguished by the favour of his master, and by the warmth of his attachment in return. His confession of him to be the Christ was a voluntary act, and highly merits our praise. But as soon as Jesus began to speak of his approaching sufferings in Jerusalem, he betrays his weakness: "Be it far from thee, Lord: This shall not be unto thee." John, the beloved disciple, is one in whose breast we would not suspect any ungoverned passions to reside: Yet, on some occasions, we see him acting under their influence. There were early strifes among the twelve, Who should be greatest; and it appears that these strifes subsisted to the last. On the very eve of their master's sufferings, and, when sitting with him at the table, the contention was renewed*. It gave occasion to his discoursing on the subject of his kingdom; and probably to his washing the disciples feet †.

* Luke xxii. 24.
compared.

† John xiii. 2. 4. verses

THE expectation of a temporal Messiah was a prejudice common to the whole nation of the Jews. Rulers, priests, and people, were universally infected with it. Shall we be surprised, that the apostles were smitten with the contagion? It would indeed have been a miracle, had they escaped it. If they laboured under mistaken notions; if, in Jesus of Nazareth, they possessed, in idea, a worldly Messiah; can we expect to see them divested of worldly passions? Must we not rather suppose them to have been greatly under their dominion? From men of little capacity, whose prejudices and attachments crossed one another, and drew in opposite directions, it would be absurd to expect much uniformity of behaviour.

THE apostles were vested with a public trust: Hence their original prejudices will appear to have no impropriety. They received the trust of establishing a religion, humbling to their national prejudice, and destructive of it. Their history informs us, that they discharged this trust with the most persevering fidelity, in contempt of danger, and even of life itself. Every

one feels, at least every one has heard of the deluding power of a darling prejudice: Let it be ever so absurd, it will often keep its hold to the end; or we quit it with all the pangs of reluctance. Shall it then ever be thought or said, that the apostles, in preaching the gospel, were employed in imposing their prejudices on the world, like deluded enthusiasts or artful impostors? Must it not rather be said, to their eternal honour, that they sacrificed, at the shrine of truth, their ease, their reputation, and even the love of life?

THE apostles were not perfect characters in any respect. But their weaknesses were balanced by some valuable endowments, which qualified them for the intimacy of Jesus, and for accomplishing the purposes of his choice. They had been chosen, first to receive his instructions, and then to communicate them to the world. For sustaining either of these parts we would judge them to be unfit; But the defect was miraculously supplied. In the mean time, let us attend to the good

qualities of which they were undisputably possessed.

THE simplicity of their character deserves peculiar attention. It betrayed them often into weaknesses of conduct. These have been traced to their sources; and, without overstraining our indulgence, can be easily excused.

IN the productions either of nature, or of art, we admire simplicity: In the characters of men, it is a beauty, which persons of nice discernment, and of just taste, will both see and admire. It shines most conspicuously when opposed to that artifice of character which is so prevalent in the world. The simplicity of the apostles, contrasted with the hypocrisy of the Jewish Rabbies, was not only amiable in the eyes of Jesus, but it rendered them the fittest persons for publishing a religion, founded on truth, and as void of disguise as the character of its author. He makes this circumstance in the character of his apostles the subject of thanksgiving: "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent,

“and hast revealed them to babes *.”

THE apostles were slow, and often mistaken: But no person can deny them the merit of being docile. They received with respect the lessons of their master: We see them often applying to him, either on subjects where they were at a loss †, or where their notions were imperfect ‡.

THE apostles, though weak men, are also distinguished by the strength of their attachment to their master. Even where their conduct is weakest, this quality discovers itself; as in the reprehension given by Peter, when Jesus foretold his sufferings; and in the remonstrances made by John on the subject of the opposition to his ministry ||. “Lord, wilt thou that we
“command fire to come down from heaven
“and consume them?” I am aware, that the fidelity of the apostles was violated in one instance. It is enough to observe, that fear and despair joined, when they saw Jesus apprehended, to overwhelm their minds:

• Matth. xi 25,

† Luke xviii. 1. Prayer.

‡ Explication of parables.

|| Luke ix. 54.

Yet their attachment to him, through the whole of his public ministry is highly meritorious. They followed him before he had derived much lustre from the fame of his doctrines, or of his miracles. They had renounced all for his sake, when he had not whereon to lay his head. They saw him opposed by persons to whose sentiments it was natural to subscribe, or of whose favour they might be ambitious. What is more, their attachment was not shaken by the severity of his doctrine, nor by the freedom of his reproofs; nay, not by the general offence of the world, nor by the desertion of friends. After a certain period, we are told, that "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus to the twelve, Will ye also go away?" Simon Peter, in name of the rest, gave this memorable reply: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life *."

THE attachment of the apostles to

* John vi. 68.

their master not only covered their weaknesses : It also qualified them to be zealous advocates in his cause ; and so co-operated with the extraordinary means furnished them for establishing his religion in the world.

S E C T. III.

Of his forming them for a more extensive Discharge of their Office.

THE ministry of the apostles, during the life of Jesus, was of small extent, and of short continuance. But the part which they were soon to sustain, in the absence of their master, was difficult and important; and the whole world were to be the spectators of their conduct. This consideration shows, how fit it was they should be endowed with supernatural powers. It also suggests the propriety with which Jesus acted, in beginning to form them, while under his eye, that they might appear with dig-

nity, as the teachers of his religion. The task was arduous, considering the prejudice and opposition which lay in their way.

WE have had occasion to take notice of the weakness of the apostles, both in sentiment and in conduct, in a variety of instances. We need only look back on some of these, to observe the watchful attention of Jesus, in seizing opportunities to enlighten them: The rebuke given to Peter on a memorable occasion, and the repeated rebuke to James and John, must necessarily be viewed in this light. But his conduct is not simply attentive: His counsels and instructions are most delicately conveyed.

THE severity with which advice is commonly given, has often the effect of irritating the person who receives it. The minds of some men are exquisitely sensible and shrink at the touch; while hard tempers, like hard metals, will not yield to the stroke, and must be melted into form. Jesus, who knew the hearts of men, beautifully accommodates himself to the circumstances of his apostles. He re-

bukes with severity, when the occasion required it : But, for the greater part, his manner is soft and persuasive. The blind ambition of James and John, discovered in their applying for the honours of his kingdom, was aggravated by every symptom of presumption or distrust : Doth he heighten the charge, by producing these aggravations ? No. He industriously avoids the unpleasant part, and kindly imputes their ambition to their blindness : “ Ye know not what ye ask *.”

PERHAPS the most compleat method of conveying advice, is to do it by some significant action. It is a method at once natural and refined, piercing and inoffensive. It has on its side the sanction of authority, not only of barbarous nations, to whom the language of signs is both natural and necessary, but of polished states, in the times of their highest refinement.

WE see Jesus practising this method with his disciples, on the first appearance of the strife, Who should be greatest : “ He “ called a little child unto him, and set

* Matth. xx. 22d.

" him in the midst of them ; and said,
 " Verily I say unto you, except ye be con-
 " verted, and become as little children,
 " ye shall not enter into the kingdom of
 " heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall
 " humble himself as this little child, the
 " same is greatest in the kingdom of hea-
 " ven *. It was of importance to inform
 them of their mistake, and, at the same
 time, not to hurt them by the manner of
 doing it. The action was so significant,
 that it required little explication ; and
 withal so gentle, as to qualify any harsh-
 ness which the explication might re-
 quire.

THE renewal of the contest, on the
 eve of their master's suffering, gave him
 occasion to renew his advice. The histo-
 rian has informed us of an admonition of
 Jesus, levelled against their original mi-
 stake, on the subject of a temporal king-
 dom ; very probably given, while they
 were yet sitting at table † ; and in the
 following words : " The kings of the
 " Gentiles exercise authority upon them,
 " and are called benefactors : But ye

* Matth. xviii. 1. 4.

† Luke 22. Compare 1 21. 24.

“ shall not be so : For whether is greater ?
 “ He that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth ? Is not he that sitteth at meat ?
 “ But I am among you, as he that serveth *.”

THE historian, who delights in describing the private scenes of the life of Jesus, informs us, that, on this occasion, after supper, he washed his disciples feet † : An action expressive of his fixed purpose to level all notions of pre-eminence among them. The circumstances which introduce the action are tender and interesting. They also describe an ardour of affection, unallayed by the feeling or by the prospect of sufferings, or even by the contemplation of the glories with which his sufferings were to be crowned ‡. The humble aspect of the divine person himself, rising from supper, laying aside his garments, taking a towel and girding himself, pouring water into a basin, and then proceeding to the action ; the silence of the disciples,

* Verse 25. 27.
 xiii. i. 2. 3,

† John xiii. 1.

‡ John

occasioned by the unexpected appearance; this silence broken by the surprise of Peter; the confusion of the apostle; the dialogue which followed betwixt him and his master; are incidents exquisitely beautiful, and at the same time are so natural, that we can have no doubt of their reality. But, what deserves our principal notice is, the moral of the action, and the manner of its application. It is conveyed to the apostles, without hurting their pride, while this was the very passion that Jesus intended to mortify. Detained in suspense by the mystery of the action, they did not perceive his meaning: But he knew how to enlighten them, and at the same time to make his admonition appear to be the natural and almost necessary result of the action: "After he had washed
 " their feet, and had taken his garments,
 " and was set down again, he said unto
 " them: Know ye what I have done unto
 " you? Ye call me Master and Lord: And
 " ye say well; for so I am. If I then,
 " your Lord and Master, have washed
 " your feet, ye also ought to wash one a-

"nothers feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do, as I have done to you *."

IN these instances, we see Jesus raising, as it were, an inward fence, for preserving peace and order in this small society : Let us now observe, what provision he also made for securing them against insults from without.

THE apostles, in the discharge of their duty, had no reason to expect milder treatment from the world, than what their master had received. Their doctrine would have the effect of provoking the prejudices and vices of men. The enlarging the sphere of their ministrations, instead of lessening an opposition, was likely to increase it. The conclusion therefore, concerning their fate in the world, was evident ; yet they were incapable of drawing it. Jesus not only reasons with them on the subject †, but unfolds the whole train of their sufferings in his cause. Not a circumstance concealed, alarming to their ima-

* John xiii. 12. 13. 14. 5.

† Matth. x. 4.

ginations; neither the rage of their enemies, their own defenceless situation, nor the unavoidableness of the danger: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in the synagogues. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake. The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child, the children shall rise up against the parents, and cause them to be put to death *". The apostles, who could not receive the notice of their Master's sufferings with decency, had great need of being fortified against their own personal sufferings. Their views were gay and florid; they neither apprehended, nor were provided for the dangers. For this purpose, it was proper to mention them; and by frequent mention, to familiarize them to their minds.

* Verse, 16. 17. 18. 21.

WHEN Moses was called forth to be the messenger of God to Pharaoh, we know how averse he was to the accepting of that honour, though he had the advantages of wisdom and learning on his side. The awful appearance of the tyrant, the difficulty of the undertaking, his own imagined inability, are circumstances beautifully and modestly urged by him as an excuse: "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? O, my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken to thy servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue*." What then must have been the situation of the apostles, modest and illiterate men, when Jesus talked to them of their appearing before councils, synagogues, governours, and kings, where both their courage and wisdom would be put to the trial! From

* Exod. iii. 11.

this distress their master kindly relieved them : “ When they deliver you up, take “ no thought what, or how, ye shall speak. “ For it is not ye that speak, but the spirit “ of your Father that speaketh in you *.” Their conduct when they entered on the great scene of action equally demonstrates the accomplishment of the promise, and the fitness of making it. Compare any part of their conduct then, with a similar one during the life and ministry of Jesus. Attend to their discourses, defences, and replies, which are distinguished by strength, and dignity, and you will be scarcely persuaded, that these are the very same persons who were the companions of Jesus, and whose conduct in that station was often mean and offensive.

THE extent of the religion of Jesus and its success in the world, were also points of great importance for the apostles to be instructed in. Jesus had often told them of the opposition which was to arise from the Jews. Perhaps they were beginning to feel it. Allowing the apo-

* Matth. x. 19.

files to be possessed of strong partialities in favour of their country, the discovery must have opened to them a melancholy prospect. Shut out from their own temple and synagogues, rejected by those of their own nation, where was it probable they should gain admittance? This was a difficulty which they could not unravel; and therefore Jesus graciously steps in to relieve them. To the multitude he had spoken on this subject in parables, according as they were able to bear it. The public character of the apostles required that the discovery should be more full and satisfactory. Accordingly, having told them that they should be brought before councils and synagogues, kings and governors, for his sake, the Gentiles are immediately and particularly mentioned. The meaning of this connection will be best understood, by attending to the order in which the events happened. In fact, the apostles were brought before councils; they were beaten out of synagogues *. An exclusion from thence naturally determi-

* Acts v. 19. 20. 21.

ned them to deliver their message to others who were better disposed to receive it. Besides, they had authority from their master to take this step. Accused of no other crime than that of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, they were brought before governors, who were either Gentiles themselves, or whose influence and favourable opinion might be of service to their cause. Such were Festus, Felix, and Agrippa.

IN fine, Jesus informs his apostles, a little before his death, of the destruction of the religion and polity of the Jews. On many accounts it was fit to give this information, previously to an extensive discharge of their office *. No object could be presented fitter to disengage them from an affection for ceremonies which were about to be abolished, or to give dignity to their doctrine and to the cause they had espoused. The historian informs us, that, as he went out from the temple, " his disciples came to him, for to show him " the buildings of the temple. And Je-

* Matth. xxiv. 1.

“fus said, See ye not all these things ?
 “ Verily I say unto you, there shall not
 “ be left here one stone upon another,
 “ that shall not be thrown down *.” But
 this was uttered, not simply as a prediction : It contained also a threatening against the Jews, for having despised the day of their merciful visitation ; and consequently furnished the apostles with one of the sharpest weapons of conviction, in combating their prejudices and obduracy.
 “ Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and
 “ perish, for I work a work in your days
 “ a work which ye shall in no wise believe,
 “ though a man declare it unto you †.”

C H A P. IX.

Of the Opposition against him.

IN the character of Jesus we meet with such an assemblage of virtues, and in his life with a course of actions so great and beneficent, that we are surprised how he was not universally respected and beloved. But if, leaving out speculation, we are guided by the history of man-

* Matth. xxiv. 2.

† Acts xiii. 41.

kind, our surprize will abate ; we will find, that the most deserving persons have often shared liberally of the malignity of the world. Can we be at a loss to resolve how the innocent, the amiable, the beneficent Jesus was despised and rejected ? The history of a Phocion, of an Aristides, of a Socrates, furnishes a solution. These persons derived much lustre from the darkness of the times in which they appeared ; yet their virtues kindled the fire of envy in the breasts of men addicted to their superstitions, or jealous of their privileges.

I am aware, that the opposition given to the person and ministry of Jesus is capable of being converted, and has been converted into a specious objection : If he was opposed by his own nation ; if he was despised both by the religious guides, and by the civil rulers of the country ; if he came to his own, and his own received him not ; has not infidelity at least a specious pretence under which to shelter itself ? Can the person be blamed in a remote period, who refuses his approbation to a scheme resisted, nay almost universally

rejected, at its first proposal? Yet, this specious plea will not stand an examination. It is not proposed to examine it in form. It will be sufficient for our purpose to give some account of the opposition against Jesus, viewed as an extraordinary incident in his history.

S E C T I.

Of the Characters of the Persons opposing him.

IN order to judge fairly of the merit of the opposition, there is one point necessary to be considered. If the age in which Jesus appeared, or if the persons among whom he lived were remarkably virtuous, the opposition would be respectable: But, if it shall appear that in some capital points they were mistaken, and that their morals were very bad, we can be at no loss to determine as to the merit of their conduct.

• IT does not fall within my design to examine the state of the heathen world at this period. They were not pro-

perly included in the personal ministry of Jesus. But the ardour with which they embraced his religion, when preached to them by the apostles *, and the instances of respect which they shewed him during his own ministry †, lead us to conclude very favourably concerning them.

THE aspect of the Jews, among whom Jesus lived, is far from being engaging. Their national character was contemptible; their morals were corrupted; their prejudices were of such a nature, that, tho' divided in sentiment on points of great importance, we will not be surpris'd to find all of them uniting in the opposition to Jesus.

IN tracing the history of nations towards their commencement, we usually meet with some period distinguished by its virtues. In tracing this nation to its first founders, we meet with a succession of venerable characters. But the moment we quit the source, the stream is infected. The twelve patriarchs, as characterised by

* Acts v.

† Matth. viii. 10.

their aged sire, prepare us for attending to the figure which their posterity make as a nation *. View them in Egypt, in the wilderness, in Canaan, in the times of their judges, kings and prophets, and they will be found to preserve the same uniformity of character; an ungrateful, foolish, and obstinate people. Some good men indeed appeared in almost every age; but, as they were few in number, so their influence was not great enough to correct a national degeneracy †.

* Joseph is indeed an exception, one of the most amiable and respectable personages in ancient history.

† Why God Almighty chused such a nation in preference to others, why he loaded them with favours, and raised up the Messiah from among them, is a mystery of the divine government into which it is impertinent to inquire. The Jews are always spoken of by their own writers as a nation beloved for the father's sake. If it shall be asked, Why Jesus chose for his apostles men, not of bright parts, but full of weakness and prejudice? If it shall be asked, Why he chose that his religion should derive no support, at his first publication, from the great or the wise of the world? the solution is obvious and well known. There was less

THE history of the Jews from scripture closes a little after their return from captivity, and only opens again with the history of Jesus and his apostles. Josephus supplies the gap, to our entire satisfaction. His information is the less exceptionable, as he is generally allowed to have been partial in favour of his own country. From his history it appears, that this period was very corrupt, especially towards its conclusion. Rulers, priests, and people were infected with the contagion. During this period the vision and prophecy were sealed up, no prophet appeared among them. Instead of prophets there arose an order of men, who having been first employed in collecting the national records, in process of time usurped Moses's chair, and maintained a reputation

probability that it would be corrupted, or that the world would take it to be a human device. Providence might chuse such a nation as the Jews as fitter instruments for working its purposes, than some of the learned, or ingenious, or polite nations, who would be more in danger, on that very account, of corrupting the divine system : For instance, such as Egypt was, in the age of the law of Mount Sinai, and such as Greece was afterwards.

as teachers, either by making additions to the law, for which they had no authority, or by flattering the prejudices and vices of the people. These were the Scribes, "who neither entered into the kingdom of heaven themselves, nor suffered others to enter."

THE high priesthood, at this time, was publicly disposed of to the highest bidder. The chief priests are often mentioned in the history of Jesus, as his most bitter opponents. Their infamous bargain with Judas is decisive of the merit of their character and opposition. The rulers and members of the great council were doubtless under the influence or the rod of their master. Jesus had been misrepresented as an enemy to Cæsar, and as aspiring to a throne. For this reason, their opposition, even supposing it to have been void of malice or partiality, is easy to be explained.

THE frequent revolutions which happened in the state, the contentions among the leaders, their frequent subjection sometimes to one prince, sometimes to another, their final subjection to the

Roman empire, of which they became a province, produced a spirit of servility in some, absurd notions of independence in others, the latter of which concurred, with other causes, to produce in the body of the people the hopes of a temporal Messiah. In times of national tumult and discontent, was it reasonable to expect, that men would be forward to espouse the interests of a person appearing in the character of the Prince of peace? Is it natural to suppose that the leaders and guides of the people would in such a juncture voluntarily quit their hold? No; These are the very persons, who, biased by interest, or moved by envy, first raised, and then supported, the clamour against Jesus, which issued in his crucifixion. Let any person of candour read over the history of a Socrates, opposed and traduced by his envious fellow-citizens, and he will instantly decide the merits of the opposition; nay he will rather wish on reflection to have been Socrates, traduced and opposed, than the wealthiest and most powerful of all his antagonists.

THE factious spirit of the Jews is a circumstance in their character which must not escape us. In the age of Jesus Christ it was triumphant, and it operated in the opposition to him with very considerable success. Perhaps it may be alleged that seditious men are much under the power of novelty, and are prompted to espouse such doctrines or opinions as will gratify that passion *. But it is to be observed in the present case, that the different factions had systems of their own, in an attachment to which they were confirmed by the strength of habit and of mutual antipathy. Against the spirit of faction in general, and against the characteristical spirit of each particular faction, the doctrine of Jesus was opposed; so that from none of them he had any reason to expect support.

THE leading factions were the Sadducees and Pharisees. There may have been others; but these make the most considerable figure in the gospel-history. They have been traced up almost to the times in which Ezra lived. In that early period, it has been observed, they stand clear-

* Acts xvi. 17. 19. 20.

ly distinguished from one another : The Sadducees, by their adherence to the written word alone; the Pharisees, by their superadding oral tradition. In process of time, their notions sprang up to a degree of extravagance; and, by the power of mutual animosity, became more distant from the truth, as well as from one another. By the time in which Jesus and his apostles appeared, the Sadducees had rejected all the scriptures of the Old Testament, except the five books of Moses. The gospel-history informs us, that they "believed there was "no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit*."

IN each of these points, the opinions of the Pharisees were different. As the former sect fell short of the truth, so the latter run into all the extravagance of credulity. They believed the traditions of the elders to be equally sacred with the scriptures themselves; and, by a natural progress, at last gave them the superiority. This is not a full account of

* Acts xviii. 8.

these two famous sects; but it is enough to our purpose. From this account, we are prepared for viewing their joint opposition in its proper aspect. Life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel; while the divine law was vindicated from that contempt which had been put upon it by the inventions of men.

FROM viewing the characters of these sects, as well as their principles, we naturally expect an opposition. Our acquaintance with the character of the Sadducees, from scripture-history, is but imperfect. Josephus * informs us, that they were few in number, and generally men of the best rank. Hence their aversion to a humble Messiah would be the stronger. They held it a virtue to dispute with their masters concerning the decrees of their sect. Hence arose their cavilling humour, and the spirit of raillery, which entered into their disputes with Jesus, on the subject of the resurrection.

THE character of the Pharisees from scrip-

* Antiquit. book xviii. chap. 1.

ture is more clear and determined: It is unnecessary, however, to rest it wholly on scripture testimony. Josephus was a Pharisee himself: He discovers a partiality on the side of their tenets; yet the following is a description which he gives of their character: "There was a certain
 "sect of the Jews, who valued themselves
 "highly upon the exact skill they had
 "in the law of their fathers, and made
 "men believe they were highly favoured
 "of God. These are called Pharisees,
 "who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings; being a cunning sect, and
 "soon elevated to a pitch of open rebellion and mischief." How much they were courted by the great, and how considerable was their influence among the people, an anecdote of the same historian evinces; I mean his account of the order which Alexander King of Judea gave the queen before his death, respecting the succession in favour of his family *: "When you come to Jerusalem,
 "assemble the chief of the Pharisees;

* Antiq. book xvii. ch. 2.

“and after you have shown them my
 “body, make them large concessions.
 “Tell them they are at liberty to use me
 “as they please; nay, to prohibit my
 “body from being interred with the sa-
 “cred rites of burial; or to inflict any
 “other punishment upon me, as having
 “been the cause of all their wrongs;
 “and above all, assure them, that you
 “will not act without their advice
 “and concurrence.” This order the
 queen obeyed; and the Pharisees, in the
 exercise of almost sovereign power,
 were guilty of such cruelties as justly
 render their characters detestable. These
 particulars, recorded by a Jew and a
 Pharisee, anticipate the figure which this
 sect makes in the history of Jesus. They
 justify his descriptions of their character,
 and prepare us for viewing them ranged
 on the side of his opponents. To take
 this side, they were in effect compelled
 by their politics and vices. Tyranny o-
 ver the minds of men, ostentation, pride,
 obstinacy, covetousness, superstition, hy-
 pocrisy in all its various forms, enter in-
 to their character. Hence it is not to be

wondered, that they should oppose one, who was not only faultless himself, but who was capable of unveiling their hidden crimes, and of shaking them in their strong hold, the favour of the people. Was it to be expected that persons, so ripened in vice, should be found on the side of truth and virtue? Can their opposition bring discredit to any cause? On the contrary, it must redound to its honour. *

S E C T. II.

Of the Causes of Opposition.

HAVING in our eye the characters of the times, and of the persons who oppo-

• What the body of the Jews were at this period, may be concluded, independently of scripture-history, from the character which they bear immediately after, in the opinion of their own historian. He describes them to be a people distinguished by the profligacy of their manners, and the exemplariness of their punishments, agreeably both to the history and predictions of scripture.

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fed the ministry of Jesus, we can proceed with more clearness in tracing the reasons of the opposition: If these are trifling or contemptible; if they are evidently the dictates of prejudice, malice, and disappointment; every candid mind must perceive how little regard such an opposition deserves, how little it affects the cause opposed, or rather how much it redounds to its advantage.

THE presumption is strong, that Jesus must have been opposed, whether we attend to his manners, his doctrine, the humility of his external appearance, or his rising fame among the multitudes who followed him. The fact is, that he was opposed. It will not be difficult to unfold the causes of opposition, whether avowed or disguised. It is proper to begin with those of the first kind, as they will serve to throw light on the other.

THE conversation of Jesus, though not without great dignity, was easy and familiar. He excluded none who sought to approach him, and even solicited the intimacy of others. His manners were mild and

engaging; but neither a-kin to the spirit of the times, nor to the manners of those who were then, or who had ever been, the guides of the people. Moses himself, the meekest man of his age, strikes us on many occasions, by the awefulness of his attitude, both in Egypt and in the Wilderness. The rod of God in his hand, is an object of terror, whether lifted up for the destruction of his enemies, or for the deliverance of his people. The judges and prophets who succeeded him, were of a severe complexion. The prophets were commanded to cry aloud and spare not. Some of them were shepherds by profession: All of them seem to have been addicted to a life of retreat, and discover in their manners that stately austerity, which is its usual companion. Thus the Baptist had appeared. Thus the Scribes and Pharisees affected to appear, but not with equal merit or dignity: Like all copiers, they had stretched the imitation too far, even to the not conversing, except with those of their own party. When, therefore, they beheld in Jesus a behaviour so very opposite to this; when

they saw him conversing easily, yet gracefully, with all, could their jealousy be asleep? Could they refrain from constructing his conduct, as in effect a condemnation of their own? Was it not natural for such persons to envy, and then to oppose him? They blamed him for eating with publicans and sinners. They blamed him for healing the sick on the Sabbath-day, and for allowing his disciples, on that day, to pluck a few ears of corn.

THE indulgent turn of his manners was an early objection. It was also openly avowed: Upon this then we must suppose a great deal of the merit of their opposition to rest. But the prop was feeble and unsound, as must be obvious to every person of the smallest discernment. There is a beauty and charm in temper and deportment, the power of which even a savage will feel, and which no unprejudiced person can resist. From beholding the graceful condescension of Jesus in his ordinary intercourse with the world, his indulgence to the weakness of his friends, his attention to the highest and to the lowest interests

of all, well might his disciples apply to him the following description of the prophet: "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he bring forth judgement into victory *."

The doctrine of Jesus was as little palatable to the taste of the age, as his manners were. It contradicted established opinions, or introduced new ones. It was mortifying to the favourite passions or prejudices of all to whom it was proposed. The appearance of Jesus as a teacher must necessarily have been disgusting to all of the same character. We have already taken notice of the personal character of the Jewish teachers. From thence it is easy to infer how some of his peculiar doctrines would be relished by them; doctrines so mortifying to flesh and blood, as even to produce disgust and desertion among his followers †.

WHEN only entering on his public character, we see him laying open the ab-

* Matth. xii. 17. 21. † John 6. 66.

furd maxims of these guides in religion, and charging them with corruptions which by their influence they had introduced or supported. This subject he introduces in his sermon on the mount. Hence arose the astonishment of the multitude, both at the freedom which he used with their teachers, and at the authority with which he instructed themselves. Many of his parables were levelled against the leaders of the opposition; nor it is a wonder they were offended, as the subjects were so unpleasant, and the application of them so obvious. They saw through the veil; and in the end Jesus threw it entirely aside. Towards the close of his ministry, we see him laying open the hypocrisy of their character without reserve, and as a prophet foretelling their ruin. After this, the most strenuous opposition ensued. Indeed we expect it; and in similar cases it had already happened. The opponents of Jesus were the posterity of those persons who had insulted Moses, and persecuted the prophets, because they told them of their vices: But did the unjustifiable opposition, given by their own age, diminish their merit in

the eyes of succeeding ones? Quite the contrary. It reflected the splendour of their merit so irresistibly, that the tombs of those righteous men were garnished by the children of their persecutors; though, with an almost unparalleled absurdity, they also in their turn became the enemies of Jesus, who acted on the same plan, and with greater authority.

AMONG the reasons why Jesus was opposed by his countrymen, the humility of his external appearance deserves a place. We naturally expect opposition to result from their prejudices in favour of a conquering Messiah. It is not enough to assert, that the humble appearance of Jesus was an almost insuperable obstacle in the way of their receiving his doctrine, or that his appearance mortified them. The disappointment of their hopes would naturally sour their spirits, and betray them into all the outrage of resentment. This circumstance, as an avowed objection, seems to have been adopted only by the vulgar, who often speak out with more freedom than others who are governed by the rules of prudence or po-

licy. Unless in the obscure village where Jesus had been educated, and on a few particular occasions, the objection was never publicly stated as a cause of offence. But with all of them, his external appearance was a secret cause. When the Baptist appeared, the enthusiasm, on the subject of a Messiah, seems to have been general. But, as soon as they saw Jesus of Nazareth claiming that high character, coldness, contempt, and opposition ensued.

I speak of the principals in the opposition. It was necessary for them to conceal the reasons of their conduct, if they regarded their interest with the Romans, whose jealousy it would have been dangerous to awaken. Acting under this disguise, they sometimes make a merit of their loyalty, as when they told Pilate, they had no king but Cæsar; and afterwards, when they applied to him to alter the inscription fixed on the cross: "This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews:" An inscription, which, under the power of their ruling prejudice, they must have

constructed as an indignity offered to their nation, and an insult to their hopes. That politics entered into the opposition, and served to inflame it, is obvious from tracing it through its progress. Their application to the disciples, to know if Jesus paid tribute; their application to himself, to decide the legality of paying it; but, above all, their charging him with sedition, and arraigning him before Pilate as an enemy to Caesar, are instances of conduct which cannot be viewed in any other light. The transition which they made afterwards, from rage to ridicule, is not surprising; for we easily despise the person whom we hate. They hated one whose appearance disappointed their hopes; and because they hated him, they proceeded to use him with cruel insolence and scorn.

THE fame which Jesus had acquired in the progress of his ministry, is one of the causes of opposition which operated very powerfully. Perhaps his fame might take its rise from the prevailing expecta-

tion of a temporal Messiah. But its progress could be owing to nothing less than the lustre of his virtues, doctrines, and miracles. His opponents could not be ignorant of the opinion of some, "that he was a good man;" of others, that "a great prophet had arisen in the world." They knew, that "the multitude bore him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which came out of his mouth. The fame of his miracles had pierced into the court of Herod." They heard or witnessed the confessions which the exertions of his divine power drew from the hearts or lips of those who were the objects of it. They heard the multitude declaring, that he had done all things well. They had received the report of their own officers sent to apprehend him: "Never man spake like this man." Was it possible they could see and hear all this with perfect unconcern? They had for a long time maintained an ascendant over the minds of the people, and had

been in the habit of maintaining it by every art of tyranny and address. When, therefore, they perceived themselves in great danger of being outshone by a person whom they despised, it is easy to conceive how they must have been agitated. As the obscurity of Jesus was mortifying to their hopes; so his fame was mortifying to their ambition, and prompted them to oppose it by every method which envy, malice, or resentment could suggest. There are two occasions in particular, where the opposition evidently sprang from this source. One, in consequence of the following declaration of the multitude: "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles, than these which this man hath done *?" Another, immediately after the resurrection of Lazarus †. On the former occasion, they "send their officers to apprehend him;" On the latter, "they gathered the council; and said, What do we? For this man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men

* Jo. vii. 31.

† Jo. ii.

“ will believe on him.” To this, they add another consideration, the meaning of which has been already explained: “ And the Romans shall come, and take away both our place and nation.”

S E C T. III.

Of the Methods by which the Opposition was conducted.

IN judging of the merit of an opposition, this is a circumstance which must necessarily be canvassed: If the methods employed in supporting it are fair and honest, a prejudice is immediately formed in its favour; but if falsehood, deceit, or violence, are found on that side, we instantly and justly form conclusions to its disadvantage. A good cause stands in need of no foreign support; it is like a regular and solid structure, which supports itself: This, with truth, may be affirmed in favour of the gospel. On all occasions Jesus himself and his cause appear with

dignity. The same cannot be said of his opponents. Allowing them to have been blinded with partiality on the side of their own system; allowing their views in the opposition to be meritorious, which they are not; yet the method of carrying it on will appear to be highly censurable, if we judge of it with common candour and equity. In a former section, we found that the opposition derives no honour from the sources to which it was traced. Let us now attend to the unfairness and violence with which it was conducted. Here it will be necessary to descend into the examination of particulars. And first, let us make a trial of the manner in which the enemies of Jesus opposed his doctrine.

IF a person of sense and candour find it necessary to oppose the opinion of another, he will make it his business first to show, that he has good reasons for opposing; if he fail in the attempt, he will rather quit the field, than dare to make a sacrifice of his sense and integrity. Did the adversaries of Jesus ever think of examining his doctrine with coolness and

candour? Did they examine it by the light held forth to them in the law and the prophets? Did they oppose it by the weapons of sound reasoning and argument? No: These weapons they never used, but left them in possession of Jesus and of his apostles. Prompted solely by their passions, deaf to the voice of reason, and blind to the charms of truth, they opposed the doctrine of the gospel by reviling its author.

To the reproach of human nature, this method of opposing is found to operate too successfully on vulgar minds. It requires some exertion to enter into the force of an argument, but none to attend to the voice of defamation. If the interests or prejudices of men are concerned, the handle for seizing them becomes firmer and stronger. We took occasion to observe the progress which Jesus had made in the good opinion of the people. Here was an engine applied for shaking them, and which, at last, produced the effect. As their representing him to be a deceiver was meant to awaken the jealousy of the Romans, so the charge of

blasphemy was calculated to excite the disgust of the Jews. Polytheism and idolatry were the great national crimes before the captivity. After their return to Judea, the unity of the supreme Being was an article of which they were exceedingly tenacious. Josephus informs us of their heroic sufferings in the cause. In reducing the objections against the doctrine of Jesus almost singly to the head of blasphemy, they acted with much dexterity. The recourse was unfair; it was criminal. But it was well fitted to unfix the attachment, and so to excite the rage of the multitude.

THE manner in which they opposed the success of his miracles, was quite of a piece with their opposition to his doctrine. It was in vain to deny their reality; perhaps they felt their power. It appears that they viewed them as containing an appeal to the senses and understanding of men. It is absolutely certain that they dreaded their influence*. They cavilled at some of his lesser miracles, and

* John xi. 47. 48.

were enraged at his greater*. Thus when Jesus cured a woman who had been bowed together with infirmity for eighteen years, they endeavoured to darken the lustre of the miracle, by an alledged profanation of the Sabbath †. This frivolous objection he repelled with such force, that "all his adversaries were ashamed;" and, no doubt, their shame was the greater, as, on that very occasion, "all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him." On another occasion Jesus cast out a devil, so that the people wondered ‡. To stifle the influence of this miracle, his watchful enemies observe, "he casteth out devils by Belzebub the chief of the devils." In this method of attack, they evidently betrayed their apprehensions of danger. The method was so absurd and weak, that it is clear they must have been under the power of those violent passions which overshoot their aim. It is not enough to say, that in the attack they betray their own weakness. Had they

* John xi. 53. † Luke xiii. 11—17. ‡ Ch. xi. 10.

been the secret abettors of the opposite cause, they could not have devised a more successful expedient for promoting its interests. Their allegation has also the most malicious aspect. From the strictness of the age, on the subject of blasphemy, we may conclude, that if the charge could have been supported, or made tolerably plausible, the influence of the miracle must have been totally destroyed. The attempt was without success; but it leaves behind it the evident marks of that unfairness and absurdity with which the enemies of Jesus proceeded in opposing him.

ANOTHER method which they practised in the opposition, was that of misrepresentation and personal abuse. Whatever was the principle from which they acted, we conclude such conduct to be dishonourable and unjust. What could we say of any opposition carried on by such methods? Could we view the actors in it without detestation? It is not enough to say that the cause, thus supported, is weak; it must also be iniquitous, if such assistance is necessary. The characters of men have a sacredness which a

person of principle, or even of decency, will not be provoked to violate, unless the superior regard due to truth absolutely demand it. Of this sentiment the enemies of Jesus seem to have been incapable. They misrepresented him in his public, they defamed him in his private character; they attempted to detract on all occasions from the merit of his actions and virtues. This false guise they artfully put on to give a sanctity to their opposition. They chose to appear in the eye of the world not as the enemies of "a good man," or of a prophet, but of a blasphemer, a deceiver, a friend and companion of publicans and sinners.

As they employed defamation, so they employed flattery to compass the same end. One historian of the life of Jesus informs us, that the Scribes and Pharisees, piqued by the superiority of his wisdom, sought to lay hands on him; but they feared the people *. The fear of the people checked their violence for the present, and suggested to them this method of deceit. They first flatter, and then attempt to inveigle him in his talk, on pur-

pose to lessen him in the popular esteem; and also that they might deliver him into the power of the governor. The artifice was ridiculous, with respect to the person against whom it was employed; but, viewed as an engine of opposition, it renders their conduct base and dishonourable.

THE treachery of the opposition is not more remarkable than its violence. By the joint operation of these, it at last became successful. The enemies of Jesus had made many attempts to take him by force. They sent out officers to seize him. They often sought to lay hands on him, but were always disappointed. At last they avail themselves of the treasonable offer of Judas. Shall it be said that these proceedings can give reputation to any cause? Doth the character of Jesus suffer in our opinion, because he was thus opposed? Do we not rather feel our indignation rising against his opposers? If their cause had been capable of deriving support from argument, we should have seen them often making use of this weapon. Their having recourse to such unfair methods of defence, forms an undif-

puted presumption, that their cause was equally wicked and untenable.

S E C T. IV.

Circumstances balancing the Opposition.

FROM this account of the opposition given to Jesus we see with what propriety it deserves to be ranged among the memorable incidents in his history. The more narrowly it is looked into, its merit, if it has any, must decrease or vanish. From attending to the manners of the age, or rather of the chief actors in these scenes, we naturally expect opposition. The causes of opposition, when enquired into, are contemptible, and the conduct of it is such, as every person of honour or virtue must utterly disapprove of. The amount of the whole is a matter easy to be determined. What is principally required, in forming our estimate, is a sound understanding, and a heart possessed of virtuous sensibility.

THE opposition is not a little weaken-

ed by the display which is occasionally given of the character of Jesus. Afflictions are often stiled the touchstone of virtue. Without adversity there are some virtues which cannot be supposed to exist, and which at the same time must exist in the model of a perfect character. I shall not enumerate these virtues in the character of Jesus, to the exertion of which the conduct of his enemies gave occasion. But it deserves our notice, that they increased in splendor, as the opposition itself increased, and even shone brightest in the darker scenes of his sufferings.

THE opposition to Jesus is, in some measure, disgraced by the signal calamities which befel his opponents. It has been frequently and justly observed, that nations usually bear upon them the fruits of their virtues or vices in this world: they are rewarded for their virtues, or punished for their crimes. The history of the Jews during their judges and kings, illustrates the truth of this observation; it also furnishes us with a key for opening the meaning of these dread-

ful calamities which befel them, in the final destruction of their city and nation.

WHEN Jesus was opposed by the Jews, he warned them of their danger, and as a prophet threatened them with ruin. This was doing no more than Moses did, when predicting his appearance: "Every
" soul that will not hearken to that pro-
" phet, the same shall be cut off from a-
" mong his people." Their rejecting him was a national deed: The rulers, priests, and people united in it. When we therefore behold them punished as a nation, the conclusion is obvious, concerning the cause of their punishment: Jesus unfolds this connection in the following pathetic lamentation over the miseries of Jerusalem: "The days shall come upon thee,
" that thine enemies shall cast a trench a-
" bout thee, and compass thee round, and
" keep thee in on every side, and shall lay
" thee even with the ground, and thy
" children within thee; and they shall
" not leave in thee one stone upon an-
" other, because thou knewest not the

“time of thy visitation.*” Let any one compare this prediction with the detail given by Josephus of the miseries in which the Jews were plunged, during the siege and sacking of their city. Let him view the wretched remains of that once distinguished people, not only scattered like exiles, but hated or despised by every nation on earth, and from the connection of these events with the opposition given to Jesus, he will discern a superiority in his cause, which, without such an opposition, it could not have acquired.

IN forming our judgment of the opposition to him, it is necessary that we take into account the extensive plan of Providence, which it was subservient in accomplishing. There is no mistake more common, than the judging rashly of the propriety of a great plan, from viewing only one corner of it. The opposition to Jesus, singly considered, presents to the mind an extraordinary, perhaps a discouraging appearance. But, in fact, it was a mean

* Luke 19 43. 44.

employed in forwarding a design, noble in its nature, and extensive in its consequences. By the opposition of the Jews their own ruin was sealed ; but the door was also opened for the reception of the Gentiles. Jesus foretold both these consequences of the opposition. History informs us with what punctuality they followed : “ Therefore the kingdom of God “ shall be taken from you, and given to a “ nation bringing forth the fruits there- “ of.” The opposition and fall of the Jews did issue in the salvation of the Gentiles, and the “ casting of them away was the “ reconciling of the world.” This is the mystery which the apostles of Jesus celebrate in terms full of rapture. They were dazzled with the majesty of the subject, which is the reason why their expression often labours, and often gives us some pain in the unfolding.

It also deserves our notice, that the opposition, though powerful, was not universal. The rulers and priests in a body engaged early on one side. Yet in that body we find some secret friends of the cause opposed ; and we are told of

many more, who, only from considerations of prudence or policy, did not avow their attachment. Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, is a notable instance. There is not a circumstance in his conduct, but what is honourable for the cause he espoused: He is distinguished not only by the confession which he made of the authority of his teacher, but by a cordial respect for his person, and by an attachment so strong, as to oppose for a moment the rage of the adversaries. "Have any of the rulers or Pharisees," say they, "believed on him? Nicodemus saith unto them, he that came to Jesus by night; Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doth?" * To say that he was prompted by a sense of justice and honour, rather than by attachment, is a suggestion so favourable to the cause, that it ought not to be impugned. But the instance is not single: "Among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of

* John viii. 48.
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“ the Pharisees, they did not confess him,
 “ left they should be put out of the syna-
 “ gogue *.” The instances of the Roman
 centurion, of the nobleman of Cana, of
 Jairus the ruler of the synagogue, whose
 applications to Jesus were equally affection-
 ate and respectful; nay, the frequent tu-
 multuous acclamations of the multitudes,
 may be viewed as bulwarks providentially
 raised up to oppose the madness of the
 age, and of the persons who appeared in
 the opposition to Jesus.

How Josephus would have stood affect-
 ed to the cause, had he been the spectator
 of what he only relates, and supposing the
 following passage to be genuine, we can
 be at no loss to conjecture : “ At this time
 “ lived Jesus, a wise man, if it may be
 “ lawful to call him a man, who perform-
 “ ed various miracles, and taught those
 “ who were desirous to learn the truth;
 “ and great numbers both of Greeks and
 “ Gentiles followed him. This was Christ
 “ who was accused by the princes of our

* John xii. 42.

"nation" *. His honourable mention of Jesus was in effect a disapprobation of the conduct of his countrymen, and authorises us to range him among those "who were not far from the kingdom of God."

WHAT has been observed concerning the opposition to the person of Jesus, may be applied to the subject of opposing his religion. Serious persons are much burdened with the infidelity of the age, and do not without reason complain of it. But the subject of the complaint, if properly examined, is neither so universal, nor so deep as they apprehend. Rational infidels are very few in number. Thoughtlessness and indifference characterise the age; and those who think of religion at all, and at the same time who think of it to its disadvantage, are commonly superficial, or vain, or capricious persons.

* Antiquit. book xviii chap. 3.

C H A P. X.

Of the Brighter Scenes of his Life.

FROM attending to the passages of the life of Jesus, which we have had under our view, we see his whole appearance distinguished by its humility: It may be, and has been, the fate of the best men to be in circumstances similar to those in which he appeared; but they are not the most favourable for attracting, far less for securing the attention of mankind.

THAT the divine favour towards men is to be judged of by their external condition, has been always a popular mistake; nor could the Jews easily avoid it, if we attend either to the spirit, or to the fancies of their laws. This consideration partly accounts for their disrespectful treatment of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding

ing of the striking displays which, on some occasions, he gave of the majesty of his character. An opposition so splendid, by the numbers and characters of those concerned in it, must have dazzled the eyes of the crowd, and must have been matter of secret regret to the chosen disciples. Jesus supported the dignity of his public character by his miracles, which are an appeal both to the judgement and to the senses. But there are occasions on which the appeal was renewed in a manner still more popular and explicit; I mean when he was transfigured on the mount; and when he rode in triumph into Jerusalem; two appearances to which we find no parallel during the course of his ministry.

S E C T. I.

Of his Transfiguration.

THIS appearance was peculiarly intended for the benefit of the apostles, in aid of the advantages which they already possessed by

the private conversation, or by the public discourses and miracles of their master. An address was made directly to the senses. No more was necessary than to keep the eyes open, in order to see the majesty of the whole. The impression made upon Peter, one of the spectators, was so strong and lively, that we see him passing over all the other proofs of his master's divinity, and resting upon this one *. Indeed, no expedient could have been devised, in favour of the apostles, more fit for counterworking the effects of the opposition, or for arming them against the offence of the cross. The propriety of the appearance, for accomplishing these ends, is very observable in every particular.

THE first circumstance presenting itself is that of the time; just six or eight days after Jesus had given the apostles notice of his approaching death, heightened with every circumstance of ignominy. How much they were mortified with the discovery, we may easily collect from the of-

fence and surprize of Peter on that occasion. The appearance therefore was extremely seasonable, at a time when the impressions made by the important discovery were fresh in their minds; after they had got some time for reflexion, and before their reflexions could drive them into despair.

THE choice of the persons who were admitted to witness the transaction, is a circumstance claiming our notice. From its importance, we would naturally expect to have found all the apostles present: But all of them perhaps were not qualified to behave properly on so important an occasion. Jesus observed the same plan of conduct after his resurrection. He was first seen by Peter, then by the two brethren travelling to Emmaus, then by the twelve. The selection made on the present occasion is such as we would expect. Peter, James, and John, were distinguished on all occasions by the intimacy of their master, and one of them by his friendship. In their public character they were also distinguished. One of

them was honoured with the keys of his kingdom*, another with the first crown of martyrdom in his cause, and another with the sight of its successful establishment in the world. The testimony of these respectable persons serves to fix the credibility of this memorable event, and the necessity of fixing it was the greater, as the event was private and miraculous.

JESUS was transfigured on a high mountain. This is a circumstance which perhaps some may think too trifling to deserve any notice. I shall only observe that sublime objects in the natural world are found to assist the soul in forming sublime conceptions. The choice of the scene of this splendid transaction was therefore the fittest to prepare the minds of the apostles for what was to follow. If, as some have ingeniously conjectured, this was the same mountain where God appeared to Moses, and gave him his instructions, it is also a circumstance which renders the whole more illustrious.

THE majesty of Jesus, in this transac-

* Matth. xvi. 19. An expression illustrated by the events recorded in the first ten chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

tion, is strongly conveyed by the outward form in which he appeared: "His face did shine like the sun, "and his raiment was white as the light." Such visible representations of the divinity were familiar to the Jews. Their ancestors had beheld him in the pillar of cloud and fire, and in similar forms, all of them magnificent. Jesus had appeared in the world in great humility, without show or comeliness, or any other external attraction. Here the scene in a moment was changed, the veil of his humility pulled off, and the majesty of his person displayed in its real lustre.

ON this occasion, "there appeared Moses and Elias talking with him *;" both of them illustrious persons in their age; both types of the Messiah; one a lawgiver, another a restorer of the law; both highly favoured of God, and, by their countrymen, held in the highest veneration. The presence of two such persons,

* Matth. xvii. 3.

was well adapted to the prejudices of the disciples, and to the design of the appearance. Jesus appears in glory, accompanied by the head of the law, and the head of the prophets: An indication not only of great dignity of character, but also of a perfect harmony between the dispensations of the law and the gospel. If we take also into account the glory of the attendants on this occasion, a circumstance which we naturally expect, and which one historian relates, the whole scene must have been exceedingly splendid, grateful to the spectators in the highest degree, and fitted to inspire the highest sentiments of reverence for the person and doctrines of their lowly, despised, and persecuted master*.

* Jesus, in the course of his ministry, unfolded the dignity of his character, and the glory of his second appearance as the judge of mankind. He taught, that he would rise again; that there would be a general resurrection at the end of the world; and that then good men should be glorified together with him. By the present appearance, these peculiar doctrines of his religion were exhibited in a striking light.

JESUS and his attendants conversed together. "They spake to him of his decease, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem*." A subject mortifying to the apostles on all occasions, and in their apprehension incompatible with his character. From his knowledge of their weakness, and on purpose to prepare them for that trying event, he had begun, a few days before this, to describe it to them, with every circumstance which could either fix its certainty, or paint its ignominy*. They were irritated with the unpleasant subject, and either did not, or could not believe it to be possible. They could think with pleasure of nothing but the glories of a temporal kingdom. Jesus provides an expedient to enlighten their minds, and to remove, or to lessen the offence given them. Every person has heard of the soft seasons of address, and with what advan-

* Luke ix. 31.

† Matth. xvi. 21.

tage they may be employed *. Now, what season could be fitter for renewing the subject of his suffering, and if possible for rendering it agreeable to the disciples, than when their minds were elevated by the splendour of the present appearance, and by the distinguished glory of their master? From whose mouths could the subject appear more supportable or respectable, than from the mouths of Moses and Elias, whose memory was dear to them, and whose words they had ever regarded as the oracles of heaven? The appearance of two such illustrious personages, discoursing with Jesus on the subject of his death, must have heightened its credibility in the eye of the apostles, which was of importance, as they were so unwilling to believe it. But this conversation served the higher purpose of showing, that the death of Jesus was, in itself, a great object, great in the

* It has been observed, that Jesus never spake to the disciples of his death, except before or after a miracle. The miracle operated as an antidote to the melancholy which the subject must have produced.

counsels of heaven, and in the plan of providence for the happiness of mankind ; a circumstance which reflects lustre on this dark scene, and gives an elevation to its abasement and ignominy *. Perhaps the impressions might be transient : But they were real ; and that is enough to the present purpose. Formerly Peter had rebuked his master, when he told him of his sufferings : In how different language doth he now accost him ? “ Lord, it is good for

* In this elevated light, Peter, one of the witnesses of the present interview, exhibits the death of his master : “ Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Acts ii. 22.

Two celebrated critics, Grotius and Lightfoot, favour the conjecture, that, by the *exodos* of Jesus Christ, “ his decease,” or departure, there is an allusion to the triumphant departure of the Israelites out of Egypt ; that as, from the departure of the latter, their liberty did commence, so the death of Jesus was the conclusion of his sufferings, and an inlet to glory. Supposing this conjecture to be well founded, it shows that the conversation was conducted with the most delicate attention to the comfort of the disciples.

“ us to be here ; if thou wilt, let us make
 “ here three tabernacles; one for thee, and
 “ one for Moses, and one for Elias *.” One
 of the historians indeed observes, “ that
 “ Peter knew not what he said ;” yet, let
 his astonishment be supposed ever so great,
 it is easy to see that the impressions made
 by the mention of his master’s death were
 such as he had never before experienced.

THE shortness of the interview betwixt
 Jesus and his heavenly attendants, the
 manner in which it was broken off, at the
 very instant when Peter expressed his wish
 of its continuance, and the conclusion of
 the interview, have a liveliness and energy
 in them which could not fail of producing
 deep impressions on the minds of the disci-
 ples : “ A cloud overshadowed them, and
 “ a voice came from the cloud, This is
 “ my beloved Son in whom I am well plea-
 “ sed * :” A testimony given to Jesus at
 his baptism, and now repeated in presence
 of three apostles, to impress them with the
 dignity of his character, and to arm them
 against the offence of the cross! This was

* Luke ix. 33.

† Math. xvii 5.

the light in which Peter constructed the testimony, and the whole of the appearance, long after it happened. In this light he held it out to the world : “ For he received, from God the Father, honour and
 “ glory, when there came such a voice to
 “ him from the excellent glory ; and this
 “ voice, which came from heaven, we heard,
 “ and we were with him in the holy
 “ mount *.”

It may be observed, that this whole appearance expresses the grace, as well as the majesty of Jesus, and presents us with a fine contrast to the Old Testament dispensation. There we behold a mountain burning with fire, with darkness, lightening, and tempest. Here the objects are grand, but mild, pleasant and serene †. There, the voice inspired such horror, that they who heard it, entreated God, that he would speak no more. Here, we see the promise, which was then made, also fulfilled : “ A prophet raised up from among
 “ themselves,” one, so amiable, and so ma-

* Pet. i. 17. † Lux blanda, et comitas paternæ vocis, Grotius in loc.

jestic, as to inspire at once reverence and love.

THERE is one circumstance in the relation of the event demanding our attention, and contributing to promote the purpose of it: I mean the distinguishing preference which was given to Jesus above his illustrious attendants. Moses and Elias were the partners of his glory on this occasion. The sight of them was, beyond all doubt, highly pleasing to the disciples. Perhaps, they felt an attachment incompatible with the respect due to their master: Perhaps, the overshadowing of the cloud might imply a disapprobation of their conduct. But we are certainly informed, that, as soon as the cloud was dispelled, "they saw no man save Jesus only." From the former all attention was drawn off: Towards him solely it was directed. We may suppose the disciples to have been for some time in suspense, dazzled with the variety and splendour of the objects: But now, the competition was fairly decided. Nor was the decision referred to their own partial conclusions: It was decided by the voice

from heaven : “ This is my beloved Son,
“ hear ye him.”

THE disciples in the issue were overpowered by the majesty of the appearance*. Their master, though indulgent to them on all occasions, did not think fit to unravel the design of it. Perhaps they were incapable at present of receiving more light than what the appearance afforded : Nor did he require them to publish it immediately to others. On the contrary, he charges them to tell no man “ the vision till he was risen from “ the dead †;” a charge which in every view must appear highly proper.

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* Matth. xvii. 9.

† It is unnecessary to account for the fear which seized the disciples on the present occasion, or to apologize for their conduct : In this manner the prophet Daniel was affected by a heavenly vision : Thus the Roman soldiers were affected by the miraculous resurrection of Jesus ; concerning whom we can have no suspicion either of enthusiasm or partiality : In all these, particularly in the present instance, the agitation of the spectators was only the consequence of what they saw and heard : Two historians agree

It doth not derogate from the credibility of this incident in the history of Jesus, or of other similar incidents, that the full disclosing of them did not, perhaps could not, take place till after his resurrection. We are told both of sayings and actions of Jesus, which the disciples remembered, and knew the meaning of, after he rose again. The transfiguration was so complex and diversified, that we have no scruple of reducing it to that class. Till the disciples should be fully satisfied in their own minds of its meaning, the subject could derive no advantage from their talking of it in a public manner.

Till Jesus rose again, it was not proper that they should mention it to others. The resurrection was an event, by its grandeur and notoriety, calculated to give a credibility to one, so extraordinary in its kind, and the scene of which was private. Before that public event, the world might

in relating, that it was not till after the overshadowing of the cloud, and the uttering of the heavenly voice, that the disciples fell on their faces, and were fore afraid.

have regarded this private one as a pious fraud, and have attempted to subvert its credibility. By the conduct to which the disciples were directed, the belief of men was established in a proper train; every fact of less notoriety than the resurrection, or less capable of public proof, resting upon this as the foundation. The love of communication is a strong principle in our nature, especially if the subject, which fills the mind, partake of the marvellous. On this account also, the charge of secrecy given to the disciples was highly proper; and accordingly we are told, that it was observed by them with the strictest fidelity: "They kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen *."

WHAT were their immediate sentiments concerning this transaction, we may collect, at least may conjecture, from the question which they put to their master about Elias: "Why then say the Scribes that Elias must first come?†" It appears that

* Luke ix. 3.

† Matth. x. 17.

they looked on this whole scene of the mount, as an exhibition of the Messiah's glory. They believed, and had confessed their master to be the Messiah. Their assurance increases on seeing him in the company of Moses and Elias. The impression made by the discourse about his sufferings seems to have been weak: The ideas of his glory accorded more with their prejudices. Jesus spake of his rising from the dead. It seems they had great perplexity about the nature of this event. They connected it beyond all doubt with their ideas of the Messiah's kingdom. They had been taught, that Elias was first to come, and to restore all things. Here a doubt arises about the accomplishment of their hopes by the Messiah. Elias had not yet come. They had only seen him in the mount, and only for a moment; yet this rising again, this restoration of their hopes, seemed to be spoken of as an event which was at no great distance.

JESUS kindly resolves their doubt, and directs them a-new to the unpleasant, but useful subject of his sufferings. I took notice in its place of the accomplishment

of the promise respecting Elias, in the appearance, character, and ministry of John the Baptist. As by his office he was the harbinger, so by his reception in the world he was a type, of the Messiah. In the history of the one, they might clearly read that of the other. John "they knew not, "but did unto him whatsoever they listed : Likewise shall also the Son of man "suffer of them *." Through the whole interview we see this disagreeable subject supported with dignity, and at the same time with a perfect accommodation to the prejudices of the persons for whose benefit it was intended.

S E C T. II.

Of his triumphant Entry into Jerusalem.

WE have no difficulty in ranging this amongst the bright scenes of the life of Jesus; or in asserting that he intended to give by it a display of his dignity. When

* Matth. xvii. 12.

we see him respectfully accosted by the great, or warming with an enthusiasm the minds of the multitude, we ascribe the effect to the charm of personal character, or to the irresistible force of his miracles and doctrine. Here we see him forming a plan, and purposely employing means for its accomplishment.

THE transfiguration of Jesus was a private incident: None, except three persons, could derive any immediate advantage from it; and the advantage was imperfect. The present transaction was public; witnessed by all, and designed for universal and immediate instruction. Both of them agree in this, that no profound reasoning was necessary, in order to understand their meaning: They addressed themselves, not so much to the reason, as to the senses of men: They exhibited the majesty of Jesus, in his public character, on purpose to counterbalance the humility of his appearance, the splendour of the opposition against him, and the ignominy of his approaching death. They, who now beheld his humble triumph, had witnessed the opposition; many

of them had promoted it, and all might have derived from what they saw very important instruction.

IN this light the season of the transaction seems to have been highly proper : Jesus gives a public display of character, in the conclusion of his life ; after experiencing the blind admiration of the crowd, and the opposition of their leaders, on purpose to mortify the one, and to give a juster direction to the other *.

* A learned critic on the scriptures has observed, " that the day on which Jesus made his entry into Jerusalem was precisely the fifth day before the feast of the passover, the same day on which the paschal lamb was taken out for sacrifice." He observes, " that there is a fine correspondence on this account betwixt the type and the antitype, who on the same day, as it were, presented himself for sacrifice † " Perhaps this may be thought by some an aiming at a rabbinical conceit. But the near approach of the passover was a circumstance of considerable moment, in contributing to give a lustre to this transaction, by the crowds who resorted to it, not only from the land of Judea, but from all the Jewish dispersions ‡.

† Lightfoot on this passage.

‡ John xii. 19. 20.

IT is more important to observe the scene chosen for this transaction, the gates of the city Jerusalem. The transaction was of such a nature, that it must necessarily have been public, and in no place could it be conducted with greater probability of success. Jesus meant to exhibit the majesty of his character before friends and enemies, in order to fix the credibility of the facts, and to give them their highest degree of lustre. The multitude had followed him into the desert, and would have made him a king: We admire the dignity of his conduct on that occasion. He was deaf to their importunities, and sought out a retreat. He intended to give a display of his kingly character: But the desert was not the fittest place; nor were the blindly attached multitudes the proper witnesses of such a display, nor the persons who stood most in need of it. With great propriety it was reserved for the city Jerusalem, distinguished by its opposition to Jesus, and where he was soon to suffer an ignominious death.

As to the transaction itself, one previous remark cannot be avoided: I mean its accommodation to the prejudices of the persons for whose comfort or conviction it was designed. All had joined in expecting a triumphant Messiah, a son of David, who should sit on his throne. The external appearance of Jesus had not hitherto corresponded with their delusive prospects. In consequence of this, his pretensions to be the Messiah were called in question by some: They were despised and ridiculed by others. The admiring crowds were often fluctuating, and even the disciples were not so fixed as to be out of the reach of danger. Here then was an exhibition well adapted in many respects, for establishing them in their opinion of the dignity, or rather the royalty of his character, and peculiarly descriptive of the Messiah, who should come in the name of the Lord to save them. Let us now attend to the memorable circumstances of this transaction.

THE first object presented to our view, is the figure of Jesus, making his entry into Jerusalem, mounted on an ass. Ma-

ny ordinary readers will be at a loss to conceive, how this appearance is reconcileable with the ideas of dignity or royalty of character. Perhaps it may strike them as an indication only of abasement and humility. Nor is it surprising, that persons who have been ingenious and industrious in vilifying the life of Jesus, should rest upon this as a fit topic of ridicule ; or that others who are as unacquainted with ancient manners, as they are wedded to modern ones, should betray, on such occasions, their partiality and folly. An eminent divine has already shown *, with great force of argument, from the Jewish historians and prophets, that the figure of Jesus riding on an ass was not only not contemptible in any degree, but strongly descriptive of his character, as the king of Israel. He observes, that the Israelites, by their law, were forbid the use of horses, and that this statute was complied with for a long course of time ; during which, neither for the purposes of war, nor of state, were these animals ever employed.

* Sherlock's dissertations on Zech. ix. 9.

On occasions of the greatest solemnity, we find the judges and kings of Israel riding upon asses. We see Absalom, when aspiring to the crown, and in the day of battle, riding on a mule, the colt of an ass; and Solomon, on the day of his accession, riding through Jerusalem on the king's mule, amidst the joyful acclamations of the people *. In many respects this illustrious prince was a type of the Messiah. The Jews had always looked upon him to be so. In the appearance of Jesus upon this occasion, the resemblance was so very striking, that the multitude could not avoid observing it: Accordingly they saluted him as the Son of David, the king of Israel, that came in the name of the Lord.

THIS transaction is dignified by the particular description given of it, long before its accomplishment, and in terms so clear and expressive, as if the prophet himself had been a real spectator: Warmed with the prospect, he breaks out into an exclamation, glowing with the majesty of the person described: " Rejoice greatly, O

* It may be observed that the ass in Eastern countries is a large and beautiful animal.

“ daughter of Zion : Shout, O daughter
 “ of Jerusalem. Behold thy king cometh
 “ unto thee. He is just, and having sal-
 “ vation, lowly, and riding upon an ass,
 “ and upon a colt, the foal of an ass *.”

We have incontestable evidence, from the history of the present transaction, that this prophecy was considered as having received its full accomplishment in the appearance of Jesus. Besides, it will be made evident in its proper place, that some of the most material circumstances are of such a nature, that no human wisdom could be concerned in bringing them about. In the mean time, the following particulars in the prophecy are clear and determined: *First*, That the prophet is describing a king or prince, the very character in which the Jews expected their Messiah. *Secondly*, The peculiar relation of that person to them, “ thy king cometh to thee.” *Thirdly*, The distinguishing features of his character and government: “ He is just, and having salvation.” *Fourthly*, His external appearance, “ lowly,” to cor-

* Zech. ix. 9.

rect their notions of a temporal Messiah: And, *lastly*, As a mark of distinction from all other kings, easy to be apprehended, "Riding on an ass, even a colt, the foal of an ass." In short, a king not only superior to their kings who lived nearest the age of the prophet, but to those of the highest antiquity and renown in their nation.

It deserves to be noticed, that the Jews, at the time of this prophecy being uttered, had no king of their own: They had lost their independency, and were under the yoke of the Persian kings; a set of princes distinguished by the tyranny of their government; they were groaning under that yoke, and expecting a deliverer. We have already observed that the figure of Jesus, as described by the historian, would naturally excite in the spectators the ideas suggested by the prophet. For several hundred years they had been without a king. They were daily expecting one, and daily praying for his appearance. In consequence of this, as soon as Jesus appeared, in the manner already described, the road was strewed with branches, and

with the garments of the multitude. These expressions of respect, joined to their repeated acclamations are circumstances which bespeak majesty on one side, and the most affectionate loyalty on the other *.

It deserves peculiar notice, that the acclamations of the multitude are so circumstanced, as to reflect no discredit on the present appearance. Perhaps it may be alledged, and in some cases with truth, that little regard is to be shown to the opinions of the vulgar, as they are often ill founded, and almost always fluctuating. Allowing this to be true, yet it is no maxim of good sense, invariably to despise them. The same person who, upon one occasion, expresses his contempt of the profane rabble, on another, acknowledges that they "sometimes are in the right †." In the present case, on the side of the multitude,

* After Jehu had been anointed king of Israel, he received the homage of his new subjects, by an act intirely similar. It was customary among the Eastern nations to testify, in this manner, respect for their sovereigns; as, in our own times it is done, on great occasions, by adorning with carpets and tapestry the streets through which they pass.

† Horace.

we see good sense, clearness, and temper :
On the side of the leaders, prejudice, jealousy, and confusion.

To derogate from the merit of the popular acclamations, perhaps it may be alleged, that the multitudes were wrought upon by the charm of novelty. The great feast of the passover was at hand. Jerusalem at this time was crowded with strangers : One historian tells us, that many Greeks had come up to the feast * from the country of Greece, or from the provinces where that language was spoken. All this is true ; but there is one fact which is the hinge of the whole. The acclamations were begun, not by the crowd of strangers, but by the multitude of the disciples, “ for all the mighty works which “ they had seen †.” This reason of their conduct is assigned, on purpose to show, that they were neither caught with the novelty, nor dazzled with the splendour of the scene, but overcome by the evidence of their senses, and by the sober judgment of their minds. The strangers

* John xii. 20, † Luke xix. 37.

again who had come up to the feast, on hearing that Jesus was coming into the city, went out to meet him, made a part of his retinue, and joined in the acclamations; but it was no popular frenzy that led them: "For this cause also the people met him, for that they heard of the miracle of calling Lazarus from the grave *."

As to any previous concert among the multitude, there is not the slightest vestige of it to be traced. Perhaps the persons who appeared on this occasion, doing honour to Jesus, had joined in the proposal of making him a king. Perhaps they might be different persons. But allowing them to have been the same, we can trace no connexion betwixt these events. They were removed from one another, by a considerable distance both of time and place: It does not appear, after the rejection of the first proposal, that it was ever renewed: Not to mention that the two events are in no respect comparable in dignity.

* John xii. 17. 18.

PERHAPS it may be alledged, that the acclamations of the multitude were riotous and tumultuary. Let us attend to the manner in which they are expressed. It is allowed, that the historians differ from one another, in relating the language of the multitude: "Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosannah in the highest." This is the account which one historian gives of the manner. Another makes this alteration or addition: "Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord." Another; "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord." And a fourth: "Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord." But though they differ from one another in some trivial circumstances, we have no reason to say, that their accounts are contradictory, or that they differ from the truth. The occasion seems to require some diversity. In the transport of joy, with which at any time a multitude is agitated, their language is swelled, broken, and disjointed: Hence

a regular and accurate description, so far from having merit, would be unnatural and improbable. This diversity in the narrations of the sacred historians would deserve to be made a subject by itself. But it was proper to mention it on this occasion, in order to prevent a plausible, tho' groundless objection against the testimony given to Jesus, as if neither the multitudes nor the historians seemed to know what they were doing, particularly that the latter could not agree in their account of the transaction.

WITH respect to the multitude, their sentiments are clear on the following particulars. *First*, That Jesus was the son of David. *Secondly*, That he was a king, or royal person. *Thirdly*, That he was a king by divine ordination. *Fourthly*, That he came on purpose to save them. *Lastly*, We have their wishes or prayers, that the ends of his coming might be accomplished. I shall not pretend to say, that their ideas on these particulars were clear and determined. There was doubtless a great mixture of that weakness in judgment, which so often appeared in the chosen disciples. But the general idea was quite

unexceptionable; and their sentiments are rendered explicite, by that actual homage which they did to Jesus as the king of Israel, who was now come in the name of the Lord to save them *.

* THERE is a majesty in the Hebrew language, which loses by any translation. Against this inconvenience, the sacred historians are always on their guard when writing on subjects where dignity of language seems to be necessary. Any person moderately acquainted with that nervous language, in its conjugated forms, will easily see with what propriety the original word *Hosanna* is retained in this passage: Especially if it be also true, what learned men have advanced, that the expression was customary, on some of the Jewish festivities, which that people connected with the coming of the Messiah †. In support of this assertion it may be observed, that the following devotions have all the appearance of being composed for some of these festivities, and at the same time of looking forward, with a prophetic eye, to the circumstances of this event. “The stone
“ which the builders rejected, the same is become
“ the head of the corner. This is the Lord’s doing,
“ and is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day
“ that the Lord hath made. We will rejoice, and
“ be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord.
“ O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed
“ be he that cometh in the name of the Lord ‡.”

† Grot. Lightfoot.

‡ Psal. cxviii 22.

THE impressiion made by this event on the enemies of Jesus, is a circumstance which dignifies it very considerably. If it had appeared to the spectators mean, improper, or ridiculous in any respect, it would neither have escaped the edge of censure, nor could the censure have lain in confinement. But, when we behold the city Jerusalem moved, and, in some measure, alarmed with his approach *; when we see the Pharisees, his watchful enemies, compelled to stand on their defence, diffident of themselves, jealous of his growing influence, can we allow ourselves to think meanly of the appearance, or of the person, whose figure in it is the most considerable? Can we, consistently with common sense, ascribe effects so great to any trivial cause? Shall we see the rage of enemies, fiercer than storms, in a moment suspended, and sheltering itself behind that pitiful resource, "Master, rebuke thy disciples;" and shall we ascribe this change to frenzy, caprice, or chance? Or must we not rather ascribe it to the presence of him, who is described in the following majestic character,

* Matth. xxi 10.

consuming "his enemies with his mouth,
 "and destroying them with the brightness
 "of his coming."

IT is now time to observe the peculiar aspect of this event on the chosen disciples of Jesus. And here a beautiful connexion of incidents opens to our view. We see him taking proper measures, that the present display of majesty should not lose its aim with them, however it might fail of it with others. We see this accomplished with a dignity which astonishes, and with a condescension which charms. The furniture of his triumph was not so splendid, as to render any great preparation, or extraordinary expedient absolutely necessary. But he chose to have recourse to one, for their sake, to prepare them for what was to follow, and enable them to behave with calmness and dignity. What ideas of his character the following instructions had a tendency to inspire, is easily conceivable: "Go ye to the village over against you," says Jesus to the messengers, "in which at your entering you will find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither.

“And if any man ask you, Why do ye
 “loose him? thus shall you say unto him,
 “Because the Lord hath need of him. And
 “they that were sent, went their way, and
 “found even as he had said unto them.
 “And as they were loosing the colt, the
 “owners thereof said unto them, Why
 “loose ye the colt? And they said,
 “The Lord hath need of him; and they
 “brought him to Jesus *.” It is not say-
 ing enough, that Jesus meant to give a
 sample of his character as a prophet.
 These particulars strongly express the di-
 vine quality of piercing into, and secretly
 swaying the hearts of men. If we shall
 suppose that they also express an assertion
 of the right of property, in what was mo-
 destly requested; then the disciples had
 enough, to fill their mind with the most
 lofty conceptions of their master’s digni-
 ty, and to prepare them for the brighter
 and more public display of it, which was
 immediately to follow.

It may be observed, that this prepara-
 tory scene, though of a private nature,

* Luke xix. 30, 35.

has the greater merit, that though privately laid, there cannot be the least suspicion of concert betwixt the persons concerned; I Mean betwixt the owner of the colt, and the messengers sent to bring it. In such circumstances an imposition must have been easily traced. Jesus and his apostles had been absent for a long time from Jerusalem. Their intimacies lay elsewhere. The torrent of that city, and of its neighbourhood, ran violently against him. The idea of property is one of the strongest we feel; here was a manifest encroachment, what at least we usually call so: We see the property of another claimed with a dignity, and yielded with a submission, which could not fail to excite admiration in the minds of the observers, as it communicates a lustre to the whole of this transaction.

IN connection with the present transaction there stands another, also distinguished by its dignity. Jesus entered into the temple soon after, and purified it *. But as with this action he ended his public

* Luke xix 45.

ministry, so with the same he had begun it, in the period of his ministry preceeding the imprisonment of the Baptist. In that place it has been already considered.

C H A P. XI.

Of the Care which he took to prepare the Apostles for his Absence and Sufferings.

THES E two subjects, his absence and suffering, Jesus himself often connected together; the connection betwixt them being both obvious and natural. Sometimes we lose sight of the one or the other during this period of his history. But one of them, at least, is always in our view.

JESUS was endeared to his apostles by the charms of character and conversation: They beheld him full of grace and truth. In him their hopes were centred; but under the power of this bias, that his bodily presence was deemed necessary in order to their accomplishment. On this account, his absence from them must have been an afflicting subject; none more af-

dicting, except his sufferings which were to precede it. Of these subjects they were unwilling to think; nay some compulsion, was absolutely necessary: But, without delicate conduct, the attempt must have been unsuccessful, or extremely hazardous.

THE behaviour of great men in the prospect of death has been always looked upon as a most interesting subject of speculation; as discovering either a superiority above objects that are the terror of low minds, or a noble expansion, beyond the narrow bounds of self, towards some general interest. If one would wish to be acquainted with the sublime of human nature, let him attend to the solemn scenes of this kind, which are exhibited by real history, or even by the glowing colours of fiction. There is no person possessed of the least claim to good taste, who can read over the discourses of Cyrus on his death-bed to his children, or of Socrates to his friends, after his condemnation, with cold indifference, or as we would attend to an ordinary story. I am far from saying that in these instances the

conversation is kept up with an uniform dignity. But in the scenes of the life of Jesus, to which we now attend, our understandings are informed, our imaginations are gratified, our affections are attached, and the whole soul seized upon by the representation of what is noble and sublime. Every sentiment expresses the dignity of the person uttering it, and at the same time, all that anxiety for his disciples, which their situation and his affection for them would naturally inspire.

S E C T. I.

Of the Informations given on the Subject of his Sufferings.

It appears from what has been already observed, that the apostles stood greatly in need of information on this subject. Their prejudices were strong, their reason unimproved, and the trial was so severe, that it could scarcely fail to overpower them. Jesus knew their weakness, and

told them before-hand of the trial. With this view the information was given in terms so plain, that there could be no danger of misapprehending it; and it was so particular, that scarcely a circumstance could come upon them by surprize. Nothing is omitted to render it mortifying and severe. The place where he was to suffer, the most public of any; the principal agents in his sufferings, men of reputation and influence; his sufferings aggravated with every circumstance painful and ignominious: "He began," says the historian, "to shew them how he must go up into Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed *." The information is soon repeated, with this additional circumstance: "They shall deliver him to the Gentiles, to mock, and scourge, and crucify him †." This

* Matth. xvi. 21.

† "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." John ii. 19. Matth xii. 40.

was an unpleasing and affecting discovery. Let us attend to the delicacy with which Jesus conducted it.

It may be observed, that the discovery was not made in an early period of his ministry; not till after what chronologists call his last passover; nor till after Jesus had appeared two full years in public, and had given the brightest displays of character, by his doctrines, his miracles, and the lustre of his virtues. It is indeed true, that he had mentioned the subject in an early period of his ministry. First, when having purified the temple, the Jews asked a sign of him: afterwards, on another occasion of this kind; but it was spoken of so figuratively, and couched in such obscure terms, that we have no reason to think that the immediate instruction of the disciples was in his eye, or that they did then understand his meaning.

As the information on this subject was long delayed, so we find it frequently renewed. It has been often observed, that men easily believe what they wish to be true: From the same bias in human nature they are disinclined to believe truths which

are unpleasant; nay, they even discover some incapacity in comprehending them. The power of this natural bias the apostles felt strongly, when Jesus first mentioned to them the subject of his ignominious death. Except one, all of them were struck with silence; an indication that their minds were stupified or overpowered. No expedient then could be more fit for recovering them, than by a frequent representation of the event, to render it familiar. Accordingly, it is described no less than four times, at no great intervals.

ANOTHER circumstance, in this information, is very observable. I mean the privacy and familiarity with which it was made. We may easily imagine the consequences of proposing the subject in great form, or of proposing it in public. It must be obvious to every one, that the apostles were but ill qualified to appear with dignity on such occasions. The rebuke which Peter gave Jesus on one of these occasions *, the absurd request of James and John on another †, are

* Matth. xvi. 22. † Mark x. 35.

instances of conduct which his indulgence could easily forgive, but would not expose to the criticism of the world. Accordingly we are told, that all the informations which Jesus gave on the subject of his death, were not only private, but were so of design. Thus the first was given on occasion of his asking the apostles privately, what the world thought of him †; another in passing through Galilee; on which occasion the historian observes, that “he would not that any man should know it. For he taught his disciples and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him †;” another on the road to Jerusalem, where it is expressly said, that “he called them apart in the way †” to repeat the information; and another, while sitting with them eating the passover.

WE cannot but admire the choice of those seasons which were fittest for making or renewing the discovery. In this light the season chosen for the first

* Matth. xvi. 13. † Mark ix. 30. 31. ‡ Luke ix. 18.

discovery must appear very beautiful. It was immediately after the great miracle of Jesus feeding thousands with a few loaves and fishes *, after the multitude had declared warmly in his favour, and after one of the apostles had made a glorious confession of him. We can have no doubt that the confession of Peter flowed from the fulness and integrity of his heart. He was the disciple who, from impetuosity and ambition, was most likely to take offence at the discovery, as, in fact, he did. But here provision was made, that he should be in the best posture for receiving it; when strengthened against a defection by the immediate feelings of attachment, and by the pleasing confidence of success. In the choice of the other seasons, a like attention is observable. Thus the discovery in Galilee immediately succeeded the transfiguration of Jesus on the mount, and his dispossessing an evil spirit, after the apostles had failed in the attempt. The discovery made on the road to Jerusalem, by the computa-

* Luke ix. 18.

tion of chronologists and harmonists, stands next in order of time to the raising of Lazarus from the grave; an event humbling to the enemies of Jesus, and encouraging to his friends. And, last of all, the subject was again introduced while Jesus and the apostles were celebrating a religious solemnity.

THE mention of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, is a circumstance which usually attends the mention of his death *. Beyond all doubt he produced it, as an antidote to the sorrow of which that unpleasant event would necessarily be the occasion. The disciples did not see the meaning of it then; but they saw it afterwards: "They doubted" and questioned with themselves, what "that rising from the dead meant." From the analogy of their sentiments and conduct, we may conclude, that they interpreted the declaration favourably. Their master was now in the brightest period of his ministry. By his doctrine and miracles his fame was on the increase.

* Matth. xvi. 21. The third day he shall rise again.

The transfiguration of Jesus soon succeeded the first discovery of his death, and the triumphant entry the two following ones. Hence, let their views of his resurrection be supposed ever so perplexed; let us suppose they meant the splendour of a temporal kingdom, it is clear that they could not avoid regarding it as a joyful event.

S E C T. II.

Of the celebration of his last Passover.

JESUS engaged in this action the same night in which he was betrayed: Hence it stands in close connection with his sufferings. From attending to the nature of the solemnity, and to the circumstances which entered into the celebration of it at this time, there can be no difficulty in ranging it among the preparatives with which Jesus furnished his apostles, in the immediate view of his sufferings.

A concurrence of circumstances fixed down his suffering to the season of this solemnity: His own choice: The councils of heaven: The councils of his enemies. The passover was typical of the Messiah. By the numerous concourse of people, his death was rendered more conspicuous; his enemies also laid hold of this circumstance to aggravate its infamy: "Ye know," says Jesus, "that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified *." Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, and consulted that they might take him by subtilty and kill him †. Then, also at a small interval, "one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests ‡" to betray him.

THAT the present solemnity had some object of great importance in its eye, may be concluded from the formal intimation of its approach, the particular preparations made, and from the ardour of soul with which Jesus engaged in it: "When the hour was come, he sat down with

* Matth. xxvi. 2. † Verse 3. ‡ Verse 14.

“ the twelve, and said, With desire have
 “ I desired to eat this passover with you
 “ before I suffer *.”

THE solemnity itself was well fitted to prepare the apostles either for the mention, or the near approach of the sufferings of their master. It was at once a joyful and an awful solemnity. It was a memorial of one great deliverance, and was looked upon as typical of another. The destruction of the first born in Egypt, and their own exemption from that direful calamity, were the objects which it presented; their bondage in Egypt, and at the same time their miraculous escape from it. It was a night, as the institution bears, not to be forgotten in all their generations. While engaged in this solemn action, the remembrance of their past miseries and dangers would be present in the mind of every devout worshipper, and naturally lead them into a train of serious thoughts. The dissipation of ordinary life indisposes the mind for attending to deep subjects, or for engaging with decency in such as are disagreeable. This

* Luke xxii. 14. 15.

then was the season, when the minds of the apostles, by dwelling on one serious subject, were in the proper tone for the mention of another.

EVERY circumstance in the celebration of the solemnity expresses the great attention of Jesus to their instruction and comfort. We have already observed, that the preparations made for the present solemnity were uncommon. This leads us to conclude, that the purposes to be served by it were uncommon also. Jesus celebrated four passover-solemnities with his apostles; this last is particularized with a variety of circumstances; one of these is the working of a miracle. For a miracle the expedient certainly was, to which Jesus had recourse for the accommodation of his disciples, on the present occasion.

“Go,” says he, “to Peter and John,
 “and prepare us the passover that we may
 “eat. And they said unto him, Where
 “wilt thou that we prepare? And he said
 “unto them, Behold, when ye are entered
 “into the city, there shall a man meet you,
 “bearing a pitcher of water; follow him
 “into the house, where he entereth; and

“ ye shall say to the good-man of the
 “ house ; the master saith to thee, Where
 “ is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat
 “ the passover with my disciples ? And he
 “ shall shew you a large upper room fur-
 “ nished : There make ready. And they
 “ went, and found, as he had said unto
 “ them, and they made ready the pass-
 “ over *.” Jesus had given proofs, on for-
 mer occasions, of his superiority over the
 powers of nature. He had expelled disea-
 ses, and had restored the sick to health.
 He had said to the winds, Peace, and be
 still ; and it was so. Here we see him dis-
 playing the divine faculty of bending the
 hearts of men at his pleasure : An exertion
 peculiarly fitted to the circumstances of the
 apostles, who were called, on the removal of
 their master, to engage in the arduous
 work of combating the prejudices and pas-
 sions of mankind.

THE celebration of this solemnity is al-
 so distinguished by the full discovery which

* Luke xxii: 8. — 13.

was made of the treason of Judas. Jesus had pointed at it on former occasions. He had early told the twelve, that one of them was a devil, immediately after another had confessed him to be the Christ. He had repeated the intimation, while he was washing their feet; but here he fully unveils it: "As they did eat, Jesus said, "Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me *." The treachery of a disciple was one of the bitter ingredients in the cup of his suffering. The action in which they were jointly engaged gives a peculiar pungency to the crime, and propriety to the mention of it; "The hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. He that eateth bread with me, hath lift up his heel against me. He that dippeth his hand in the dish with me, the same shall betray me †." The most delicate pencil cannot paint the distress of the disciples on this occasion. They first look on one another, and then looking at Jesus, ask one by one, Lord, is it I? An innocent mind can scarcely

* Matth. xxvi. 2 .

† Matth. xxvi. 23,

conceive the idea of crimes, which the guilty brood over with pleasure; it is stung with the imputation. This was a severe trial to the eleven, whose hearts were warmed with loyalty to their master; but it was mitigated by the discovery of the traitor; and this discovery was mitigated by the choice of the season fittest for the purpose; the season of ease and familiarity, while they were sitting at table, eating and drinking with their master *. The conclusion of the solemnity wears the same aspect with every preceeding part of it. Jesus shuts up the whole with the following declaration: "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, till the kingdom of God shall come †." As he thought fit to signi-

* Grotius hath very elegantly observed, that there are three steps by which Jesus conducted his apostles to the discovery of the treason. First, by declaring that the traitor was one of the twelve; then, that it was one sitting near him, dipping his hand with him in the dish; and, last of all, pointing out the man by a sign: "He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas."

† Luke xx. 18.

fy that this was the laſt occaſion of his having ſuch intercourse with them before his death ; ſo there is a kind intimation made, that the intercourse would be renewed with greater comfort and ſplendour ; an intimation, though different in language, yet in ſentiment much the ſame with a ſubſequent one : “ All ye ſhall be offended becauſe of me this night : But, after “ I am riſen again, I will go before you “ into Galilee *.”

S E C T. III.

Of the Inſtitution of the Supper.

THE figure of Jeſus is, on no occaſion, more graceful and attracting than on the preſent. He was about to ſuffer an unmerited and ignominious death, a fate galling to a generous mind ; he alſo clearly foreſaw it. On this occaſion he riſes ſuperior to all perſonal concerns, and is attentive only to the diſtreſs of his friends. This was the pri-

* Matth. xxvi. 32. 31.

mary object of the institution : There were others more remote and extensive, which were to open in consequence of his death; but, for exhibiting them in their just light, that event was absolutely necessary : “ Do this in remembrance of me,” is the preceptive part of the institution : Yet it had properly no meaning, till Jesus first died, and then ascended into heaven. That the comfort of the disciples was the leading object in the eye of their master, will appear from attending to any one particular in the history of the institution.

FIRST, it may be observed, that the institution of the supper immediately followed the celebration of the passover. Hence a connection was evidently formed betwixt them. But there was also a natural connection; one at least which had long before this time subsisted. It has been already observed, that the Jewish solemnity was supposed, by the more discerning part, not only to look back to their deliverance out of Egypt, but forward to the appearance of the Messiah, of which event the other was typical. The words of Jesus, in concluding his last passover, were capable of

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being constructed, as if he meant to declare, that this solemnity was now to cease, or to resolve itself into another *. According-ly the Christian institution presses it so close, as to have the appearance of being the concluding part of it, solemnized, not only in the evening of the same day, in the same chamber, and at the same table, but with the same bread and wine with which it was usual to conclude the ceremony of the passover. The relation betwixt the two, in these respects, served as a line of direction in tracing other relations or points of resemblance: For instance, the passover was the memorial of a deliverance: By the present institution, the disciples were directed to regard in the very same light the death of their master. Their notions of deliverance by his death were erroneous and indigested: For this reason, in the body of the institution, he corrects them. Yet the fixing the general idea of a deliverance by the death of their master, was doing not a little for compo-

* I will not any more eat thereof, till it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. Luke xxii. 16.

sing their minds, and inspiring them with comfort.

JESUS instituted this solemnity, in the same night in which he was betrayed; this, we know, was only a very short time before he suffered. Much has been said, indeed too much cannot be said, of the dignity of character which this very circumstance exhibits: It was calm, unshaken dignity. By the season which Jesus pitched upon for instituting this solemnity, we see him consulting the comfort of his disciples, with all that cool attention which we could expect from an ordinary person in his most easy hours. Whatever was the impression intended to be made, it is evident, that this season must have been the most favourable to its success. It was as late in his ministry, and as near to the hour of suffering, as circumstances could allow. His enemies had already concerted their criminal plan. Judas had entered into their views, and had promised to betray him. Had this institution made its appearance in some earlier period, its primary end, the comfort of the disciples, could not have been

accomplished. Had the brighter scenes of his life immediately succeeded, a distraction of thought must have taken place, too encouraging to their delusive views of a temporal kingdom. Even the impression made was too easily defaced, though the interval was but short betwixt the hour of this institution, and the hour of his suffering.

THE attention of Jesus, to the comfort of his disciples, in the prospect of his death, is strongly expressed by the solemn action itself. In all ages of the world, and in every nation, eating and drinking together has been one of the ordinary expressions of friendship. In forming associations, men had been also in the habit of sacrificing animals, sometimes human victims * ; when they did

* Plutarch gives two instances to this purpose : One of them was that of the young Roman noblemen, when they were forming their plot to restore Tarquin. The other is that of Cataline and his confederates. "*Homine mactato libant sanguinem.*" "*Hominem mactantes, degustarunt carnem.*"

Vit. Public. Ciccr.

eat together of the flesh, and drank of the blood, accompanying the action with curses on themselves, if they departed from their engagements. The Jews were allowed, nay were commanded by divine authority, to partake of the sacrifices offered to the Deity, in testimony of their interest in his protection, and as a pledge of their fidelity. It was already observed, that with bread and wine Jesus and his disciples concluded the passover. Hence the institution of the supper was excellently accommodated to their ideas, and indeed to the common sense of mankind. When we see Jesus taking the bread and wine, and offering them to the disciples, as the symbols of his body and blood, can we conceive it possible for him to have given a stronger, or more tender declaration of that union betwixt them, the bonds of which were indissoluble? What purpose could this institution serve, if his death should prove the grave of their hopes? Or in what sense could they be partakers of a body, which was to moulder into dust? The institution was intended to be the pledge of his love, and

the cherisher of their hopes, when they should behold him stretched out on the cross, or consigned to the tomb. To this institution, the following words of Jesus have been supposed to allude; and supposing the allusion to be just, it is undoubtedly a fine one: "Except ye eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of God, ye have no life in you; for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed, and I will raise him at the last day*."

THE connection which Jesus pointed out in this institution betwixt his death and the remission of sin, is a circumstance also from which the disciples might have derived a great deal of comfort. The remissableness of sin is a doctrine which men have fondly embraced in every age.

* Writers of great judgement and accuracy have resolved this institution simply into a memorial of the death of Jesus. They derive their opinion from what they call the words of the institution. "Do this in remembrance of me." Words which could have no meaning till Jesus died. Its first and most natural aspect is that which has been now presented.

They expressed their sentiments on the subject by the almost universal use of sacrifices. By divine authority, sacrifices made a great part of the Jewish worship. Mankind seemed to have been persuaded, that, without the shedding of blood, there could be no remission of sin. The death of Jesus, exhibited in this light, was well adapted to comfort the disciples, in the midst of present sorrow, and apprehensions about the future. Some of them had been criminal, and all of them were chargeable with weakness. Here was a declaration emitted to save them from despair, and to dispose them, when the occasion offered, to return to their duty. Some of the sayings of Jesus the disciples did not, and could not, fully understand, till he rose from the dead. There can be no doubt, that, when he rose, this declaration served to inspire the hope of being received into favour.

THIS institution was a preparatory exhibition of his own sufferings. He engages in it with a soul, not only superior to all uneasiness, but full of joy from looking forward to the effects of his suffer-

ings. The man who, rising above the dread of the most formidable objects, can behold them with pleasure, on account of some enlarged good, constitutes a dignified character : We may grieve at his distresses ; but our grief instantly loses itself in admiration. In this point of view Jesus appears. He sits down with the twelve, having a cruel death before him. He had often told them of the event ; but they would not believe it to be possible. In breaking the bread, and in pouring out the wine, he sets it most convincingly before their eyes. All this indicates an undisturbed state of mind. He offers to the disciples the symbols of his sufferings with the same composure which he displayed in enduring them, and cheerfully offers thanks to his heavenly father : For what ? Unquestionably, for the salutary and extensive effects of his sufferings. Perhaps it may be true, that the disciples did not enjoy the full comfort of the serenity and cheerfulness of their master. Their slowness, their prejudices, nay their attachment, might obstruct it. But the design was noble, the appearance was a-

nimating! And if it had only the effect of preserving them from despair, or of holding them in suspense, till they saw the issue, a point was gained of very considerable importance.

JESUS concluded this solemnity as chearfully as he began it. He concluded it with an hymn of praise, which, though an usual part of the passover-service, enters into the other with great propriety; it reflects an agreeable light on the institution itself; it expresses the dignity of its author, whose soul, no fears, no certainties, could disquiet; especially if it be also remembered, that, after singing the hymn, he immediately entered on the scene of his sufferings*.

The above observations are not intended as a full account of this institution. Its primary design, or its immediate relation to the disciples, was the subject which offered itself. They who wish to see it minutely handled, will find many excellent treatises on the subject. What is offered in this place, may furnish matter of

* The Mount of Olives.

agreeable speculation to a well disposed mind. It may also serve the use of directing, to the source of this appointment, those who pretend they cannot find any rational meaning in it, and of rectifying the notion of a more harmless class of men, who have been in the habit of looking on it as a melancholy service.

S E C T. IV.

Of his farewell Discourse.

THIS preparative for his death and absence differs considerably from the two preceeding ones. These have a peculiarity in them not to be paralleled in ordinary life. But this bears a greater resemblance to what we sometimes observe, or what we are informed of by history.

THE behaviour of illustrious men in the last hours of their life, is wonderfully attracting. To their discourses and conver-

* It is almost unnecessary to inform the reader that the discourse usually passing under this name includes John, Chap. 14. 15. and 16.

fations with their friends, we eagerly listen. These passages every person must relish, who has not been at pains to divest himself of the common feelings of his nature. That this passage in the history of Jesus, should not be universally admired, must be owing either to want of taste, or to a total incapacity of attention.

WE admire Socrates in his last discourse consoling his friends for the loss they were to sustain by his death, heightened by the injustice which was the occasion of it. The character of Jesus, his more important situation, the dignity and attention of his conduct, render him an object infinitely more attracting. The disciples of Socrates were possessed of quick discernment, and were even as refined as their master : The disciples of Jesus were men of slow understanding, and great dexterity was requisite in working on them. Socrates, like an ordinary man, often mixes his discourses to his friends with reflexions on the cruelty and injustice of his enemies :

The consolatory discourses of Jesus are unmingled and pure. The consolations of the former derive their strength from his own innocence, and from the malignity of his opponents: Those of the latter spring from a great variety of sources of a quite different nature.

It has been already observed, that the great object of these private interviews betwixt Jesus and his disciples, was to give them assurance, that the happy union begun in his life would not be interrupted by his absence or death. Without such an assurance, the event of his resurrection might overturn their confidence of having a place in his love. His ascension might create the same sentiments of distrust, and extinguish those very hopes, which it was so well fitted on other accounts to inspire. Against these consequences, we see him here providing.

A sacrifice to friendship is the light in which Jesus now exhibits his death to the disciples. They could not have viewed it in any one so amiable or comfortable. There were other lights more extensive in which he had formerly represented it;

and some on this very occasion*. But, in the present, there is a beauty and energy, which at once seizes and charms the soul: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." This is the sublime; it is the triumph of friendship. It is but seldom exhibited; but, wherever it appears, it suspends or mitigates the sorrow which we feel; it creates attachment, and excites admiration. The disciples of Jesus, during the whole period of their intercourse, had experienced his friendship. He had not only instructed their minds, but had disclosed himself to them without reserve on every occasion. All therefore that now remained undone, was to lay down his life for them. A generous mind opens itself to the contemplation of human misery, even when assistance is unavailing. How amiable then, how compassionate, the attentions of Jesus;

* This is my blood shed for many, for the remission of sins. Mat. xxvi. 28. — "The Prince of the world cometh, and hath nothing in me," Jo. xiv. 30. That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father hath given me "commandment, even so I do." Jo. xiv. 31.

* Jo. xv. 13.

He not only declares to the disciples, that by his death, he was about to seal his friendship; but, with sensibility to their sorrows, he pursues and expatiates on the delightful theme: He brings himself down to their level, and exalts them to his own: "Henceforth
 "I call you not servants, for the servant
 "knoweth not what his Lord doth;
 "but I have called you friends, for all
 "things that I have heard of my Father, I
 "have made known unto you."

The absence of Jesus was, to the disciples, an afflicting event. The very mention of it had filled their hearts with sorrow. It was necessary that they should be prepared for the event. It is agreeable to observe how Jesus anticipates their distress, and supplies them in that very hour with such considerations as were most effectual to remove it. These considerations are so much interspersed with others, which have the sufferings of the disciples as the object, that it is not easy to disjoin them; nor is this circumstance of connexion without its beauty.

JESUS had comforted the disciples by an assurance, that their union with him was such as could be affected neither by his absence nor death. This truth is beautifully intimated in the allegory of the vine and the branches. He doth not leave them to guess at the application : He explains it, and thus concludes : “ These things have I spoken, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full*.”

JESUS informs the disciples of the design of his absence : “ To prepare a place for them†.” He urges the propriety of it, from considerations of their interest and comfort. “ If ye love me, you would rejoice because I said, I go to the Father†.”

JESUS assures them that his absence would be supplied, greatly to their comfort ; and that by the power of his interest he would procure this supply : “ I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of

* John xv. 11. † John xiv. 2. ‡ John, xiv. 27.

“truth; he will guide you into all truth*.” Elijah had said to Elifha, a little before his translation, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. “And Elifha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me†.” Jesus acted on a higher plan than the prophet. His ideas are more delicate and tender. He talks like a parent, when in the most critical situation, to his children. He provides for the comfort of the disciples: He puts them and their interests under a proper administration: “I will not leave you comfortless;” or more literally, “orphans‡.” Concerning the Spirit, his administrator, he says, “He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak. “He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and show it unto you.” In fine, Jesus comforts the disciples by the promise of coming again. The affection which we bear to an absent friend, his distance from us, the distresses through

* John, xiv. 16. † 2 Kings. 2. 9. ‡ John xiv. 18.

which he has passed, or the honours to which he is raised, are circumstances which greatly enliven the prospect of seeing him again, let the absence be ever so long. This promise, therefore, has a chearful aspect, even supposing it to have received its full accomplishment when Jesus shewed himself to the disciples, after his resurrection. But it is necessary to refer the promise of his coming again to a more remote period, and to view it as connected with his going to prepare a place for them: "I will come again, and receive you " to myself, that where I am, there ye may " be also *."

ON this occasion Jesus resumes the subject of the sufferings of the disciples. The mention of his own would serve recal afresh the subject to their minds. He had mentioned it early, on purpose to correct their prejudices, and that afterwards they might have no cause of regret: In resuming it now, there was an obvious propriety. The prospect of their distress was becoming every

* John, xiv. 3.

day more formidable, in proportion to its near approach. Their fears too would increase from the increasing opposition to their master. Every consideration must have suggested this as the proper season for renewing the subject. It is the nature of a present passion, if it is violent, to absorb all others. The minds of the disciples were, in effect, lost in the contemplation of their master's absence and death: Hence the mention of what affected themselves personally would be less sensibly felt, or less in danger of overpowering them. The following are the words which conclude the discourse: "These words have I spoken to you, that
 "in me ye might have peace. In the
 "world, ye shall have tribulation; but be
 "of good cheer, for I have overcome the
 "world*."

* John. xvi. 33.

S E C T. V.

Of the intercessory Prayer.

THE behaviour of Jesus on the present occasion expresses both tenderness and sublimity. Having comforted the disciples by his discourse, he proceeds to pray for them, with an earnestness which betrays affection, and with an elevation suited to the dignity of his character. We are told in the history of his life, that he sometimes went apart by himself to pray. The disciples were weak and blind. The work, to which he had now called them was important. The difficulties in their way were apparently insurmountable. They were persuaded of the dignity of his character, and had openly confessed it. It was therefore kind to give them some striking view of that powerful interest which would be ever at hand to support them and of that tender affection in which they might always confide*.

* It hath been remarked, that our Saviour having discharged his office, as the prophet of his people,

THE beginning of the prayer presents the first of these objects: "Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him*." Jesus prays most ardently for himself. He chose to be a model of piety and humility. Besides, it is easy to observe, how every personal wish issues in the comfort and happiness of his disciples.

chose now to exhibit his priestly character. Under the Jewish law, it was the office of the high priest to bless the people, and to intercede in their favour. Jesus had told his disciples, that he was going to prepare a place for them. Here it is observed, that he gives them a sample of his employment in heaven, or discovers by what means he should prepare a place. This notion, when traced in its consequences, is not merely a theological remark, the justness of which we allow. The tracing every consequence of the notion would lead far beyond the limits of the plan of this section, which was to consider the prayer of Jesus, in its obvious, simple, and affecting light, as a display of his tender concern for the honour and comfort of his disciples.

* John, xvii. 1. 2.

HIS concern for their comfort is indeed expressed by the whole prayer. The circumstance of its connexion with the consolatory discourse, renders this very observable: It immediately succeeded the other; it was spoken in the presence, and in the hearing of the disciples. We must view it as an effusion of the benevolent heart of Jesus, warmed with the interesting subjects of which he had been discoursing, or rather transported beyond them. Prayer is the language of the soul in distress: It issues from the fullness which is within, sometimes without design or reflection; and also naturally brings out with it the occasion of the distress: "These words spake Jesus," meaning the preceeding discourse, of which the disciples and their distresses had been the subject, "and then lifted up his eyes "to heaven *."

EVERY single request, which Jesus offers for his disciples, every single consideration by which he urges his requests, expresses the highest tenderness of affection and re-

* John xvii. 1.

gard for their comfort : He pleads their relation to God ; his own relation to them ; his interest in them ; their attachment to him hitherto inviolated, the instance of one disciple excepted ; his labours for them, past or to come ; their disconsolate situation ; their dangers and labours in his service : “ They are
 “ thine, and thou gavest them me. All
 “ thine are mine, and I am glorified in
 “ them. I have given to them the words
 “ which thou gavest me, and they have
 “ received them. Now I am no more in
 “ the world, but these are in the world,
 “ and I come to thee, Holy Father, keep,
 “ through thine own name, those whom
 “ thou hast given me. For their sakes I
 “ sanctify myself, that they also might be
 “ sanctified through the truth. Neither
 “ pray I for these alone, but for them also,
 “ which shall believe on me, through their
 “ word *.”

FROM the discovery now made, the disciples might conclude with certainty, as to their fast hold of the affection of their master. But this

* John xvii. 6, 8, 10, 11, 19, 20.

circumstance of itself could yield them only a partial comfort, without taking into consideration his power of making them happy. To persons in their situation, this was a discovery admirably calculated to elevate their minds, and to clear their prospects amidst that cloud of sorrow in which they must have been involved by the mention of their master's absence and sufferings.

S E C T. VI.

Of the Discovery which he made to the Disciples of their Behaviour in the Hour of Trial.

IT is one of the most delicate tasks, to tell a person, possessed of honesty, and of little experience, that his integrity, in some trying instance, may possibly fail him. Is thy servant a dead dog, that he should do this great thing? was the reply of Hazael to Elisha, when, as a prophet, he unveiled to him some passages in his history. In ordinary life, a disco-

very of this kind would be an office of friendship; yet peculiar dexterity is required in making it.

THE situation of the apostles at this time was uncommon. They were all, the traitor excepted, men of integrity. They were possessed of good intentions; but were slow and unexperienced. In attachment to their master they had been immoveable, though the temptation was sometimes strong. They had made protestations of fidelity repeatedly; yet he knew that they would forsake or deny him. Every consideration of propriety and compassion pressed for a discovery of their conduct; the instant approach of the temptation; their sudden dispersion; the danger of their being driven into despair; the importance of cherishing their hope, and of preparing them for the notice of their master's resurrection.

FROM our knowledge of the disciples, it is easy to judge how such a discovery would affect them. Their prejudices, their attachments, their protestations would rise in abhorrence, at the following declaration: "All ye shall be offended, be-

“cause of me this night †.” Let us observe how the discovery is made, and what are the circumstances of propriety or delicacy which attend it.

THE first circumstance observable is the season pitched upon for the discovery. Concerning the season, we can have no doubt. It immediately followed his farewell discourse and prayer, which were intended by him as preparatives for his absence and suffering. The minds of the disciples, soothed and relieved from the pressure of one distress, were in the best disposition for being told of the approach of another. Having born the greater load, we scarcely feel the lesser; at least we are not so much in danger of being overpowered by its weight. I am far from saying that the imputation of crimes is a light burden on an innocent mind; but the confidence of the disciples was their relief, though it proved to be ill founded.

THE lateness of the discovery is a circumstance which must not be left unnoticed. Jesus spake, in an early or middle

* Matth. xxvi. 31.

period, of his sufferings, and the sufferings of his followers : The honour of his religion seemed to require it. In the present case, there was no room for this motive to operate : The effects of an early discovery could be neither pleasant nor salutary. On the contrary, it must have produced, in the disciples, the most painful anticipations, and have had the effect of preying on the vigour of their minds. It was kind, not to make the mortifying discovery till necessity required it, till the disciples had no more than time to summon up their courage, or rather while it was inflamed by the preceeding discourses of their master.

WHILE Jesus discovers to the disciples their conduct in deserting him, he seems to make a concealed apology for it : "For, " it is written, I will smite the shepherd, " and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered *." Learned men are divided in opinion, whether these words are quoted as a prophecy, or a proverb : It is not our task to determine this point. But it is of

* Matth. xxvi. 31.

importance to observe, that, on whatever side the truth lies, it contains a declaration in favour of the disciples extremely kind and indulgent.

VIEWING the words as the accomplishment of a prophecy, we must refer them to the passage of Zechariah *, from which they are taken with a small variation. The great Messiah is often described, in the prophetic writings, by the tender image of a shepherd. If he be the person whom the prophet here describes by the same image, the scattering of the sheep very aptly describes the dispersion of the disciples, who, like sheep, on the loss of the shepherd, were timid and defenceless, without skill or resource. If we suppose them to have been acquainted with the writings of the prophets, and especially with those passages which were looked upon as descriptive of the Messiah, it is easy to see, what comfort they might derive from viewing their near relation to that illustrious person, and from their being comprehended in a prediction respecting him.

As a proverbial manner of speaking, these words of Jesus have the same indul-

* Zech. xiii. 7.

gent aspect on the disciples. That the Jews might have such a proverb, is not at all unlikely. Other nations had similar ones*: "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered," is saying what always or usually happens in one case, and what we are not surprized at, should it happen in such as are similar. It is very probable, that the disciples did not fully comprehend the application of the proverb when it was uttered; this supposition cuts off all pretence for alledging, that their conduct was furnished previously with an excuse. But it clearly implies a most indulgent and comforting apology for them when, on hearing that Jesus was risen from the grave, and in the prospect of seeing him, they were stung with reflections on their weakness or their guilt.

It must also be observed, that the unpleasant discovery is finely softened, both by the assurance of his rising again, and also of his indulgence in over-

* Virgil speaks thus of the bees: "Regi incolumi, mens omnibus una; amisso, rupere fidem." And Livy, of the dispersion of a mob: "Sicut acies funditur, duce occiso; ita dilapsi passim, alii, alio."

looking their weakness: "After I am
 "risen again, I will go before you
 "into Galilee*." Jesus had introduced
 the subject of his resurrection immediately after the first discovery of his death and sufferings†. Here the subject is resumed with great propriety. He doth not simply declare that he was to rise again; but informs them of the place where they would find him after his resurrection. Jesus and his disciples were sometimes, in scorn, called Galileans. They belonged to the province of Galilee. It was the place of their frequent resort, and the scene of many pleasant interviews betwixt the disciples and their master. The promise of meeting them in this place, was in effect a pledge of the continuance of his friendship, in the event of his rising again: It was a preservative against that despair which the reflection on their guilt would naturally inspire. From the event, we may judge of the comfort of this promise. For to this the angel clearly refers, when he delivered to the women at

* Matth. xxvi. 32. † Matth. xvi. 19.

the sepulchre the following message: "Go
 " your way, tell the disciples and Peter,
 " that he goeth before you into Galilee;
 " there shall ye see him, as he said unto
 " you *."

PETER was an honest and affectionate disciple; yet he was a prime transgressor. He not only forsook Jesus, but denied him. His crime was highly aggravated, on account both of honours and favours conferred. He had early and openly professed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. His denying him was a crime, which, cloathed in all its circumstances, would fill him with horror on reflection, and endanger his being cast into despair. Here was a delicate case, one strongly pleading compassion, where a discovery of the danger was necessary to lessen the surprize and confusion which followed the crime. The forwardness of Peter,

* GROTIUS observes, that the phrase "going before them," is a continuation of the metaphor which Jesus had been using with the disciples; signifying, that, as a shepherd, he would collect his scattered flock, and provide for their safety: In this light they had all the comfort which persons in their situation could desire, and all possible encouragement to return to their duty.

arising from an honest zeal, furnished an opportunity; and Jesus seized upon it as the fittest for his purpose: "Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, that this night before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice," in reply to the affectionate protestation of the disciple: "Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended *." It is not to be forgot, that the discovery also followed the kind apology, which he had been pleased to make for the desertion of the disciples, and the kind assurances of their being restored into favour.

* Matth. xxvi. 33. 34.

C H A P. XII,

Of his Sufferings.

WE rise in our esteem of a person of worth by the frequent opportunities which we have of being acquainted with him, and by often revolving his good qualities in our mind. Hence, the concluding parts of the life of any illustrious person, recorded in history, are commonly the most interesting. They are also decisive of character, and reflect a lustre on every preceeding part of his conduct.

It may be likewise observed, that those scenes are the most interesting, in which we see such a person involved in distress. Where distress is supported with dignity, the mind is furnished with one of the noblest objects of contemplation. Those distresses which arise from weakness or misconduct, may touch our humanity,

and draw forth our compassion ; but in order to their becoming a great object, we must be able to trace them from another source. If we see a virtuous person suffering by his virtues, or rather by the same they bring along with them ; if the methods by which he is opposed are base, or only exceptionable ; if persecution, ignominy, and death, are the rewards of his services for the good of mankind ; it is easy to judge how we will be affected. Doth any man pretend to say, that Socrates is a less considerable person, because, by the artifice of his fellow-citizens, he was opposed and put to death ? On the contrary, common sense and reason suggest, that he is in some measure indebted to the severity of his fate for the greatness of his reputation.

IN the sufferings of Jesus we behold the concurrence of almost every circumstance which can either engage our hearts, or attract our attention. The opposition formed against him had arrived at its crisis, and his life, distinguished by suffering, was now drawing towards a close. In

these concluding scenes, he must appear, to an unprejudiced observer, an illustrious object, dignified by the greatness of his sufferings, and by the real greatness with which he sustained them.

S E C T. I.

Of the Agony in the Garden.

JESUS was distinguished through his whole life, by a dignity of behaviour, and by a presence of mind, on all trying occasions. Here we see him almost overwhelmed with the feeling, or with the prospect of sorrow: What his sorrow principally were, is not our task to examine. It is enough to observe, that Jesus felt as man, and on all occasions acted with a dignity suitable to his divine character. We must not, therefore, be surprised or offended with the excess of his sorrow: We must suspend our judgment: We must wait the issue; and admiration will prevail in our minds.

Our surprize on this occasion will be lessened, by attending to the circumstance of decorum accompanying it; I mean the secrecy, almost the solitude of the scene. It is in solitude, or in the presence of a few friends, that persons of great minds give expression to their private sorrows. Under the eye of the world they feel themselves restrained: A sense of what is decent may entirely stem the tide of grief. But solitude, or the presence of a friend, invites and encourages it to flow in its native channel. There is something in excessive sorrow, or in the excess of any passion, that diminishes dignity of character in a certain degree, and reduces in our eye the person under the power of it to the ordinary level of humanity. On this occasion, therefore, Jesus acted with the most entire propriety: "Sit ye here," said he to the disciples, "while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful,

“and very heavy *.” Joseph acted in this manner, when agitated by a passion which was become violent by restraint: He commanded every man to go out of his presence, when “he made himself “known to his brethren †.”

IN attending to the interesting scenes which fill up this part of the life of Jesus, it is proposed to point out the circumstances in each which seem either to darken or enlighten them. For it is to be observed, that in the most humbling there is a lustre displayed, which is the more remarkable, by the dark shades which surround it.

THE first humbling circumstance presenting itself on this occasion, is the complaint, which Jesus uttered: “My soul is

* Matth. xxvi. 36. 37. The particular detail given by all the historians does great honour to their veracity. It is a proof that they were persuaded of the entire propriety of their master’s conduct, If they had entertained any suspicion of the contrary, the whole transaction was so private that it could have been easily suppressed.

† Gen. xlvii. 1.

" exceeding sorrowful even unto death *:"

A complaint expressing the very depths of anguish. A complaint the more observable, that his whole life had been distinguished by a noble superiority to suffering.

IN the same light we must view the circumstance of the persons to whom the complaint was made. Jesus knew that his disciples were ill qualified to dispense comfort; He was acquainted with their affection for his person, and their zeal in his service: But he had experienced their weakness, and knew what prejudices darkened their souls. If we feel ourselves sinking under the load of sorrow, we seek the aid of such as we apprehend are both able and willing to share it. Here we see this divine sufferer applying to persons, whose help he knew was unavailing. But they were his chosen friends, and for that reason, into their bosoms he pours his distress.

His application to them is qualified, in some measure, by one to his heavenly Fa-

* Matth. xxvi. 38.

ther. Yet the subject of the application is humbling, and presents us with an image of the deepest distress: 'Father, if 'it is possible, remove this cup from me.' We see dejection, irresolution, nay, even horror, possessing his innocent soul. We see him plunged into the very depths of his sufferings, when only surveying them in the prospect, and, in the end, cast into such an agony of sorrow, that the sweat came from him as large drops of blood*.

THE behaviour of the three disciples, during the distress of their master, must be also taken into the account. It is a considerable relief to the mind when oppressed with sorrow, to experience the sympathy of those to whom we apply for relief. The sympathy of a friend not only lightens, but dignifies misfortunes; it gives us some importance in our own eye, and also in the eye of the world. On the other hand, the man who has friends,

* Luke xxii. 44. Authentic evidences have been produced of the reality of this appearance, in cases of exquisite sorrow.

yet, in his misfortune, stands single and unsupported, is truly a humble object. Such was Jesus on this occasion : He takes with him into the garden of Gethsemane three friends to be witnesses of his anguish. In their presence, nay, into their bosom, he powers out his griefs: They sympathize with him; but are instantly overcome, and fall asleep with sorrow *.

If some circumstances, in the appearance of Jesus, on this occasion, are humbling, there are others which dignify and exalt it. If he sink in our eye in one aspect, he rises infinitely higher in another.

THE depth of his distress, whatever might have been the cause of it, pleads strongly as an apology on that side where it is most open to exception. Complaint is the natural garb of distress: So far from being offensive, on proper occasions, it is graceful and attracting. When we see Jesus powering out his griefs, applying to his disciples, and bespeaking their friendship; when we see him applying to heaven for relief; it is no more than we may suppose the

* Matth. xxvi. 40.

greatest minds capable of in similar circumstances. But it is not barely propriety, it is beauty and dignity of conduct which attracts us.

THE conduct of Jesus, in this juncture, is distinguished by a peculiarity of attention to the behaviour of his friends. He had led them out to be the witnesses of his agony, that he might familiarize them to sorrow, and prepare them for witnessing his ignominious death. When, on this occasion, he gave the following order, "Tarry ye here, and watch with me *," we may be in danger of concluding, that he meant to employ the disciples to give him notice of the approach of his enemies. But, when we know the reason of the order, we are convinced that he was more deeply attentive to them than to himself. We almost excuse the man from taking part in our interests, who is under the immediate feeling of anguish. Such conduct we would reckon to be great and uncommon. Here we behold a dignified ob-

* Matth. xxvi. 38. † Ver. 41.

ject ; Jesus in great distress, yet all attention to the welfare and honour of his friends. He knew where their weak side lay, and on that side he fortifies them. He warns them of the danger, and of the consequences of its falling upon them unawares. He provides for them with the same tenderness of affection, and entire propriety of conduct which we would expect from our best friend only, when in a state of mind wholly calm and unclouded.

HIS own behaviour to the disciples in consequence of their weakness and remissness, is also a circumstance in the transaction which gives it a great deal of dignity. By this time we are no strangers to their behaviour. They fell asleep during the distress of their master, after he had warned and exhorted them to be on their guard. When the mind is oppressed with anxiety or grief, it is the more susceptible of injury of any sort. The unkindness, the coldness, or unconcern of a friend in that season, not only offend, but appear highly criminal. There are other circumstances which may inflame the account ; as

if our friend has been the party obliged by the intercourse, if he disappoint our confidence, or is deaf to our importunity. If there be room at all for complaint, here we would think we had got full scope for indulging it. These are only a few of the aggravations which entered into the behaviour of the disciples of Jesus on this occasion. Honoured with his intimacy and friendship, they were called upon to a task neither severe nor expensive; not so much for his sake as their own; repeatedly called upon; yet as often reluctant. But how divine is his conduct! How gentle the rebuke dispensed! How indulgent the apology! "Why could ye not watch with me one hour? The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh weak †."

AN entire acquiescence in the determinations of providence dignifies human nature very considerably. The person who in actual distress, or from the clear foresight of his fate, can enter into the views of providence, is an object which, with pleasure,

• Matth. xxvi 40. 41.

we contemplate. We have seen the agony into which Jesus was cast on this occasion ; tho' our imagination loses itself in searching for its source. We have seen all the reality of intense sorrow, poured out in complaints, first to his friends, an un-availing resource; and then to his heavenly Father. With pleasure we hear them issuing in this submissive and calm request: "Father, not my will, but thine be done *." Instances of acquiescence in the will of providence, indeed, occur in common life ; but here the distress so far exceeds any of the ordinary kind, nay, so far exceeds our conception; the struggle is so bold, and the victory so perfect, that the divine person engaged in it becomes a singularly illustrious object.

CHEARFULNESS in encountering sufferings has still a greater degree of merit, than mere submission, let it be ever so entire. The one is like waiting for an enemy, with a good countenance; the other is, in effect, making advances towards him, and preventing his approach. This circumstance also dignifies the agony

* Luke xxii. 42.

of Jesus, and like the former derives its lustre from the clear foresight and direful apprehension of his sufferings. He knew that the treason, which Judas had been meditating, was now about to operate. He knew that the traitor and his armed associates were at hand to apprehend him. Nor was he ignorant of any of these indignities which were to follow. Without a miracle, all resistance was vain: Attempts to escape were too late, and might be deemed inglorious: "Arise," says he to his half-waking disciples, "Arise, let us be going: "Behold they are at hand which betray us *."

A circumstance is produced by one historian, which also contributes to throw a lustre on this dark scene: I mean the appearance of the angel from heaven strengthening Jesus in his agony †. In what manner these benevolent beings could aid him, is not our task to inquire. They are always spoken of in scripture, as employed by the Almighty to execute his commands. The presence of the angel is,

* Matth. xxvi.

† Luke xxii: 43.

therefore, to be regarded as the intervention of heaven; a circumstance which would enlighten the darkest scene of life, and must aggrandize in our eye the person on whose account it was now made.

S E C T. II.

Of his being apprehended.

THE prophets of the Old Testament were under no mistake in describing the Messiah as one who should be rejected of men, and numbered among transgressors. The progress of the opposition against Jesus, and the violence with which it was conducted, give us farther openings into the character of his enemies, while the charms of his own personal character are also unfolded.

THE most virtuous men, in corrupt times, have suffered indignities, mortifying to a sense of honour, and which, had we lived in the same age, would have put to a severe trial our opinion of their merit. If it be true that the rabble,

in spite of pity, hate the condemned person, it must hold more certainly, that they detest him, before matters come so far. In fact, if they see a person seized upon, under the notion of a criminal, they instantly condemn him, without inquiring into the nature of his crimes. Let not the observers of the present scene of ignominy in the life of Jesus be disconcerted, on account of the humble figure which he must necessarily make in their eye. Let them not be afraid to contemplate every abasing circumstance. The issue will be comfortable, when other circumstances also are taken into the account.

THE appearance of the enemies of Jesus, on this occasion, was splendid; for either Priests and Pharisees mingled in the crowd who came out to seize him, or, in giving the order, their authority was interposed*. We may easily conclude, how mortifying an exhibition the whole must have been to the disciples of Jesus, and how ill supported his dignity, had it not been possessed of more

* Matth. xxvi. 47. John xvii 3.

powerful resources than their presence and assistance. On one side, a numerous band, with leaders at their head, whose interests and passions rendered them formidable. On the other, eleven persons, almost defenceless; for they had only two swords, and probably knew little or nothing of the use of them.

THE most abasing circumstance in this event, is the treason which was employed in bringing it about. That men should suffer indignities at the hands of enemies, is what they expect, and is an event for which a wise man will be always prepared. But it is mortifying to be wounded in the house of a friend. It sinks one into an opinion of his own insignificance, and may also have the effect of sinking him in the eye of the world. Jesus was dishonoured by the treason of a disciple, who had beheld the shining actions of his public, and the attractions of his private life; who knew the places of his wonted resort, knew where to find him at this present moment, in the darkness and solitude of the night. Some of his associates, perhaps,

were compelled to engage in the enterprise. The band of soldiers were only doing the duty of their profession. Judas, by his audacity and desertion, confounds and overpowers us.

THERE are circumstances also which dignify the appearance of Jesus on this occasion, and which render him an illustrious object. I might confine myself to the display given of irresolution and timidity on one side; of presence of mind and unparalleled dignity of conduct on the other.

FROM attending to the history, it is evident, that the armed multitude did hesitate in the execution of their purpose of seizing Jesus, after the treacherous signal was given. We are at no loss for circumstances which would lead them to hesitate. Perhaps they were ashamed of their guide, and were deeply stung with the pointed interrogatory: "Friend, Wherefore art thou come?" Perhaps they experienced that inward distrust which bad men often feel in the very moment of executing their premeditated purposes.

Perhaps they distrusted the goodness of their cause, and were smitten with that reverence for virtue which the presence of it almost always inspires. This latter conclusion naturally follows from the relation of the historian. He makes no encomium on the presence and dignity with which Jesus received the advances of his enemies; he relates with great simplicity, that "Jesus went forth and said to them, "Whom seek ye? They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith to them, "I am he. As soon as he had said to "them, I am he, they went backward, "and fell to the ground*." The picture with which we are here presented is as lively as it is uncommon. We imagine that the characters of the persons are for a moment exchanged. We see the rage of the armed multitude in a moment subsiding, their ferocity converted into dejection of soul. We see the victim of their fury in their power, and their hands almost unable to seize him. We see him approach them not only with dignity,

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* John xix. 5. 6.

but with that elation of soul, which we could expect only of a hero, when about to seize upon the spoils of victory.

THE conduct of Jesus is also dignified by the peculiar situation in which it was displayed. His enemies came to seize him just at the end of his bloody agony, when his soul had been exceeding sorrowful. Excessive sorrow has usually the effect of relaxing the natural tone of the mind. In this situation objects of terror must make a deeper and more successful impression. The adversaries of Jesus had already made some feeble attempts to seize him. But the present attempt was vigorous: A band of soldiers appear supporting an armed multitude with Judas at their head. Their former attempts had been in daylight, in places of public resort. They now assault him in obscurity and retreat. The silence and solitude, the darkness and stillness of the night, the lanterns and torches and weapons were all objects adapted to inspire terror. The plan was formidable, and every precaution taken to insure success. Yet the soul of Jesus was undismayed and undaunted. He was not ignorant

of their errand; yet, with a presence that astonished them, demanded what it was.

JESUS was not ignorant of his danger. He engaged in it, having the full view of every subsequent step of his suffering. Many men, in common life, are indebted to their ignorance for the resolution with which they look dangers in the face. The full view of them, either near or at a distance, might have the effect of shaking the most fixed purpose of the soul. In this respect Providence deals kindly with mortals, that they may act without perplexity the several parts assigned to them. Had the conquerors of the world been able to divine the hardships in which their enterprising genius engaged them, it may be affirmed, that one half of them would have wholly desisted, or have stopt short in the middle of their career *. How beautiful then, how striking, the unadorned narration which tells us, that "Jesus, knowing

* On this account the critics have admired the judgment of Homer, who makes the two greatest personages in his Iliad, Achilles and Hector, to brave danger, and persist in heroic action, under the strong impressions of their approaching fate.

“all things that should come upon him, “went forth *” in quest of his enemies, and displayed in their presence a resolution and unconcern which for a moment disarmed them of their fury, and made them fall to the ground.

As some of the objects presented in this scene were terrifying, so others were provoking: A circumstance also which exhibits the conduct of Jesus in an admirable point of view. Under the influence of any one passion, men often act below themselves, and perhaps are more often misled by their resentments than by their fears. There can be nothing more galling to a generous person, than to suffer by the treachery or malevolence of those whom he has served and obliged. Jesus experienced on this occasion both the one and the other. The treason of Judas was an abasing incident, it was also highly provoking.

ONE who suffers by treachery must have feelings very different from the person who suffers by open force. The perfidy

* John xviii. 4.

of a companion or friend gives a poison to the sting of affliction, insomuch, that the greatest and most invincible minds have felt and sunk under it. Cæsar, though a tyrant, knew how to forgive. But the sight of Brutus among the other conspirators, the sight of an honoured and obliged friend, is said to have quite unmanned and overpowered his soul. David, who sustained, with an unparalleled generosity, the hatred of Saul, yet could not refrain from complaining when attacked from this quarter: "It was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have born it; neither was it he that hated me that magnified himself against me; but it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance *." That the betrayer of Jesus should have been a disciple and friend is therefore a circumstance which gives a deep colour to the treason, and must have rendered it highly provoking. Yet it is heightned by the manner in which the treason was displayed. Judas advances before the multitude, after gi-

* Psalm lv. 12.

ving them the signal, ("whomsoever I shall kiss, it is he, hold him fast *"), approaches Jesus, saying, "Hail master, and kisses him †." He had been already warned that his treason was disclosed to him, from whom it was of the greatest importance that it should be hid. Infidelity and ingratitude had already entered into his crime. Hypocrisy and effrontery were necessary to compleat it. The conduct of Jesus, on this occasion, is fully delineated in a few short but lively strokes, expressing the most generous sensibility: "Friend, wherefore art thou come †? Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss ‖?"

THE appearance of the multitude, or rather the errand on which they came, presents another object extremely provoking. They had witnessed the greater part of his public life. They had admired his doctrine. They had seen and had wondered at his mighty works. He had received their homage, as the King who came in the name of the Lord to save

* Matth. xxvi. 48.

† Matth. 26. 50.

† Ver. 49.

‖ Luke xxii.

them. Their present behaviour was both perfidious and ungrateful. Yet he only remonstrates against it as absurd and inconsistent: "In the same hour, said Jesus "to the multitude, are ye come out, as "against a thief, with swords and staves, "for to take me: I sat daily with you "teaching in the temple, and ye laid no "hold on me." He even apologizes for their behaviour: "All this was done that "the scriptures of the prophets might be "fulfilled *."

JESUS was ever attentive to the interests of his disciples, in preference to his own; here we have a striking indication of this habitual bias of his mind. It serves to enlighten and exalt the abasing scene.

JESUS, through his whole life, was indulgent to the weaknesses of his disciples, anxious for their honour and safety, when either of them was in danger. In the present juncture, more critical for himself than any preceeding one, his attention to them is beautifully dis-

* Matth. xxvi. 55. 56.

played. He was on the point of being delivered up to his enemies. He makes no attempts to ward off the blow. He stipulates calmly and heroically for the safety of his followers: "If ye seek me, let these go their way †." We may ransack all the volumes of biography, but we cannot find a more beautiful display of generous attachment. Acts of sublime generosity are usually displayed in the gayest scenes of life. Change the scene, you shall find the same persons contracted and interested. If a few great men have been exceptions, we shall find some favourable circumstances contributing to make them so. Cato could not support the prospect of a prison, or of bonds: It rendered him insensible to the feelings of tenderness and generosity, and furiously drove him on to the dreadful extremity. We admire Socrates in prison discoursing calmly to his sorrowful friends. But it is hard to say how the same Socrates would have brooked their desertion. The prospect of such an humiliation, joined to the horrors of a pu-

* John xix. 8.

blic death, would probably have discomposed his serenity, and have rendered him incapable of the divine sentiment, so strongly expressed in the conduct of Jesus: "If ye seek me, let these go their way."

JESUS was ever attentive to the great ends of his ministry. His attentions are not suspended by the mortifying incidents which now presented themselves. On this very occasion, he works a miracle expressive of his mercy and power; I mean the miracle of healing Malchus's ear*, which Peter had cut off with his sword. A miracle was finely adapted to enlighten and adorn this whole appearance. It was fitted to co-operate with the first impression made by the presence of Jesus, when his enemies went back, and fell to the ground; and also with the reason of the command given to Peter, to put up his sword, which he had drawn in his master's defence: "Thinkest thou, that I cannot now pray my Father, and

* Luke xxii. 51.

“ he shall presently give more than twelve
“ legions of angels *?”

BUT this miracle also deserves notice, as it expresses, in its most amiable light, the compassionate character of Jesus: He shows mercy to one in the very act of enmity against him. The Old Testament history exhibits, in the behaviour of Elijah and Elisha, two most lively contrasts to this, on occasions similar to the present. When, on the point of being seized, the one called down fire from heaven to consume his enemies; the other prayed to God to smite them with blindness. The disciples, on a former occasion, had urged their master to use the same methods of violence against his opposers. These methods he utterly rejects. He condemns them on the present occasion, by his own example. His avoiding to repell the attempts of his enemies, by some extraordinary exertion of avenging power; his employing his power, in an act of beneficence and compassion, served as the fittest illustration

* Matth. xxvi. 53.

of his own memorable saying : “ The son
 “ of man came not to destroy mens lives,
 “ but to save them *.”

I shall only further observe, that this miracle makes its appearance with the highest propriety, viewed as an atonement for the attempt of Peter to rescue his master. It defends the attempt, either on the side of ridicule, or on the more exposed side of riot and injury. If an injury was done in the transport of passion, it was instantly remedied. The conduct of the disciple indeed scarcely requires an apology. It is no other than what we are prepared for, and expect from the warmth of his temper, from his prejudices, his attachments, his professions of fidelity ; and above all, from that indignation at villany, with which the occasion could not fail to inspire an honest mind, the sight of the traitor-disciple at the head of the multitude.

* John xviii. 9.

S E C T. III.

Of his Arraignment before the High Priest.

NEITHER the character, nor the cause of Jesus, can suffer in our esteem, by attending to the proceedings of his enemies against him. On the contrary, according as we advance, we see both increasing in importance and dignity. At the same time his humiliation is so strongly marked, that we might be in danger of judging amiss, if we did not particularly attend to the circumstances in his appearance which dignify and exalt it.

How mortifying, in the eye of vulgar prejudice, is the appearance of Jesus carried off by his enemies; brought before the high priest and his council, subjected to an illegal trial, having crimes laid to his charge, witnesses hired to prove them, suffering the petulant cruelty of bystanders, during the course of the trial, and in the issue adjudged worthy of death? Indeed, in the eye of equity, and of calm reason,

the presumption lies on the side of innocence, till the contrary appear. The most virtuous person may have the misfortune to be ill used, in an age, and among a people universally corrupt. As this is what we may naturally suppose, so history affords many instances of it. When we behold the distresses of virtue, how do we sympathize with the sufferer? How are our feelings of sympathy instantly converted into those of esteem for his person, and into all the ardour of indignation against the authors of his sufferings? It is impossible to be indifferent in reading over this passage of the history of Jesus. On one hand, we see every symptom of a very bad cause, in which his enemies are engaged. On the other, we behold an amiable display of insulted and provoked, but patient dignity. If, in the eye of the world, or of vulgar prejudice, the appearance of Jesus shall be despicably thought of, the more correct eye of reason will discover the fallacy, and discern a dignity not the less real on account of its disguise.

IN reading over any ordinary trial, with a view to judge of the merit of the cause, we always take into consideration the established character of the judges. Our opinion concerning their merit, gives us a considerable bias, either to the side of approving or condemning their decisions. If, in the course of their proceedings, they shall betray want of comprehension, or want of candour and integrity, it is easy to see how their determinations will be regarded.

JESUS was carried before the high priest and council of the Jews. They had been always violent, and almost unanimous in opposing him. We have already examined their characters, in order to judge of the merit of the opposition *. From thence, we must necessarily form an unfavourable opinion of their qualifications as judges in the present case. Their interests, and their prejudices must have united in strengthening the antipathy. Jealous of their declining influence among the people, they could

* Chap. ix.

not endure a rival in the popular favour. Subject to the Romans, and secretly repining under the yoke, they flattered them, in order to promote their private interests. It was easy to avail themselves, for this purpose, of their enmity to Jesus. This secret cause of enmity did not now appear; but it was openly avowed afterwards, in the presence of Pilate, when the multitude, under the direction of their guides, cried out, "We have no King but "Cæsar." They expressed their apprehensions and views on occasion of the miracle of raising Lazarus from the grave: "What do we? for this man doth many "miracles. If we let him thus alone, all "men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come, and take away both "our place and nation *."

THE historian has produced the opinion given at that time by the same high priest, before whom Jesus now appeared as a criminal: "One of them named Cai-
"phas, being the high priest that same

* John xi. 47.

“ year, said unto them, Ye know nothing
 “ at all, nor consider, that it is expedient
 “ for us, that one man should die for the
 “ people, and that the whole nation per-
 “ rish not*.” From a person of such
 corrupt principles, from one avowing the
 preference of utility and expedient to
 justice and equity, we are prepared for
 that iniquitous conduct in the course of
 the trial, of which the history informs us.
 The iniquity of their proceedings against
 Jesus offers itself to our observation in
 a variety of particulars.

JESUS was questioned by the high priest
 in the entry of the trial, concerning
 his disciples and his doctrine. Such pro-
 ceeding in any ordinary case would be
 thought to resemble an inquisition. It
 approaches at least towards that case in
 law, where the criminal has a right to
 complain when questions are put to him
 on the points to be inquired into, and
 which are only alledged by his accusers.
 Besides, it is no breach of charity to sup-

* John xi. 49. 50.

pose that the high priest, by putting questions to Jesus, did mean to inveigle him on trial, that out of his own mouth he might have somewhat to accuse him. This had been the base, though unsuccessful artifice of his enemies during his public ministry. That it was applied on this occasion, is strongly suggested by the provoking insolence of the officer, who struck him with the palm of his hand *, as well as by the pointed and prudent reply of Jesus: "If I
"have done evil, bear witness of the evil,
"but if not, why smitest thou me †?"

THE accusers are greatly embarrassed in forming the charge. This circumstance strongly marks the absurdity and iniquity of their conduct. It is a point of material justice to one brought before a criminal court, to fix the precise point with which he is charged, and then to support it by evidence. If no crime is positively alledged, if the charge is only vague and undetermined, an honest judge would have no scruple in dismissing it. He would even stigmatize such proceedings, and eve-

* John, xviii. 22. † Ver. 23.

ry honest mind will enter into his resentments. Suppose the present to have been the case of a person in whose fate we had no special interest, could we attend without emotion to the simple detail of the proceedings against Jesus? The high priest had attempted to ensnare him by questions, and to draw forth the shadow of a charge. The attempt was without success. Behold the mean, the infamous expedient to which they retreat! "Then the chief priests and elders, and all the council, sought witness against Jesus to put him to death *." We conclude the cause to be iniquitous, which such an expedient was brought to support. We regard the persons concerned in it, as the objects of detestation.

THE recourse had to false witnesses, the difficulty of obtaining them, the embarrassment which this produced, the late appearance of two hired witnesses, their apparent boldness, and this succeeded by their contradictory evidence, are circumstances which would strike us in a ridiculous light, did our resentment and in-

* Matth. xxvi. 29.

dignations allow it. "They sought false
 "witnesses against Jesus, to put him to
 "death, but found none; yea, though
 "many false witnesses came, yet found
 "they none. At the last came two false
 "witnesses and said, This fellow said, I
 "am able to destroy the temple of God,
 "and to build it in three days *. But
 "neither so did their witnesses agree to-
 "gether †."

It has been observed by commentators, that the words of Jesus are not quoted with fairness. The words of the evidence differ considerably from the following which Jesus spake, and convey a different meaning: "Destroy this temple," pointing to himself, as must be supposed, "and in three days I will raise it again ‡." It has also been observed, that nothing less than a restraining power could have prevented persons so abandoned, as hired witnesses, from agreeing in some plausible story. But it principally deserves our notice, that the disagreement of the witnesses gives an aspect to the cause, as the cause

* Matth. xxvi. 60. 61. † Mark xiv. 59.

‡ John ii. 19.

of falsehood; truth being always consistent; whereas falsehood can assume, and naturally assumes a thousand different faces.

BAFFLED in the application of this artifice, the adversaries of Jesus retreat to that with which they had set out, the drawing something from his own mouth as the ground of an accusation against him: But they are more instant and urgent, jealous lest their enemy should escape out of their hands: "Answerest thou nothing? Art thou the Christ? I adjure thee, by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou art the Christ, the son of God *." These were the questions put to him by the high priest. Such importunity with Jesus to become his own accuser, must form a presumptive proof, that the cause of his adversaries was wicked and desperate. A good cause has such internal supports, that there is no necessity of having recourse to unjustifiable expedients. This conduct of the judge is indeed exceeded by the indecent violence of conduct which immediately

* Matth. xxvi. 62. 63.

followed: "Then the high priest rent his
 "cloaths, saying, He hath spoken blas-
 "phemy; what further need have we of
 "witnesses? What think ye? They answer-
 "ed, and said, He is worthy of death *."
 Jesus had allowed it to be a truth, "that he
 "was Christ the Son of God." On this
 concession, the sentence was founded which
 condemned him; a sentence as impious
 as it was iniquitous, after the evidence
 given that he was a divine person.
 Our resentments are compleated by at-
 tending to the cruel and mortifying indig-
 nities which immediately followed, autho-
 rised by the presence of the judge, per-
 haps by his influence: "They spit in his
 "face, and buffeted him, and smote him
 "with the palms of their hands, saying,
 "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who it is
 "that smote thee *."

It is not enough to say, that the ar-
 raignment of Jesus gives an occasion of
 displaying the character of his enemies,
 and the badness of their cause. It exhi-
 bits his own character and cause in a

* Matth. xxvi. 65. 66.

† V. 67. 68.

beautifullight: Both shine the brighter by the malevolence and iniquity employed in opposing them.

JESUS, on this occasion, gives displays of dignity, both in his silence, and in his replies to the interrogatories of his judge. We must not call them his defences: As he had no fixed charge brought against him, so no defence was necessary. Both in his silence and replies, we see him invariably chusing the fittest seasons for each; the certain indication of a mind unruffled by present calamities, and not overburthened by the future. But this is not saying enough. Let us trace this subject in some particular instances during the progress of the trial.

THE examination of Jesus was begun on the subject of his disciples and doctrine. On the subject of his disciples, he is totally silent; and his silence gives a beautiful display of that concern for their comfort, by which his life was distinguished. It is of a piece with the generous stipulation which he had so lately made for their se-

curity when his enemies came to seize him*.

ON the subject of his doctrine, he replies with fullness and freedom. This conduct we expect from him, who "came into the world to bear witness of the truth." He talks as one, who, superior to censure, and to the fear of consequences, was convinced that he had said nothing but truth. He appeals to the world, to whom his doctrine had been published, and whose account of it would not be liable to the suspicion of partiality: "I spake openly to the world, and in secret have I spoke nothing. I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple, whether the Jews always resort †:" A plan entirely different from that of impostors, unless they have the secular arm to support them. They industriously shun the eye of the world; they deliver their tenets secretly to a few; and proceed to divulge them only as they find it safe and convenient. We may therefore view the trial of Jesus as the trial of his doctrine. This he defends

* John xvii.

† V. 20. 21.

with such dignity, that no attempt was made either by facts or by argument to overturn it. By the silence of its first adversaries, it rests, and will for ever rest, on this solid foundation, that "it was spoken openly to the world;" a circumstance urged by Paul, in his defences before Agrippa: "This thing was not done in a corner *."

JESUS was questioned by the high priest on the subject of his public character. His answers, on this occasion, display fortitude and magnanimity. His public character had been already established by miracles. On this foundation, not only multitudes had confessed him to be the Christ; but one of the body of the council, not liable to the imputation of credulity, nor swayed by interest, had made a like confession; nay, many of the rulers had believed in him, who durst not openly avow their belief. Hence, he might have either avoided a reply, or have given one which would silence them. But he chose rather to alarm their fears

* Acts xxvi. 26.

by a majestic representation of his character as a judge. Can we attend to it, without imagining that the personages in the present scene are for a moment exchanged; the humble Jesus seated on his tribunal, and his haughty enemies lying prostrate before him? "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*."

IN some situations there is a dignity in silence, which all the powers of eloquence cannot reach. In the case of deep distress, it is very observable. By this weapon, opprobrious language and injurious treatment of any kind are baffled and repelled. Every man considers himself as possessed of the natural privilege of complaining, if he be ill used. To waive that privilege, to refuse to complain, not from meanness or fullness of spirit, but from a consciousness of excellence, is a high indication of dignity. The circumstances of the present distress were provoking. The false witnesses produced; their contradictory testimonies; the opprobrious

* Matth. xxvi. 64.
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manner of giving them; the cruel and repeated indignities offered; were all of such a nature, as would awake resentment in the gentlest breast, and bring forth the language either of indignation or complaint: Yet Jesus opened not his mouth, till necessity compelled him; the necessity of witnessing a good confession, and of making a last effort to open the eyes of his blinded enemies.

AMONG the abasing incidents in this scene, there is one yet unnoticed; I mean Peter's denial of his master. There are circumstances which both aggravate, and alleviate his crime. It deserves notice, that the humiliation of Jesus appearing as a criminal, surrounded with enemies, is not a little increased by this very incident: Even then we see him denied by a chosen, sworn, and obliged friend; denied in that moment, when a confession would have been most meritorious; denied in his own presence and hearing; denied repeatedly, and solemnly, with curses and oaths. Yet, mortifying as these circumstances are in the offence of the disciple, they display the per-

fect character of Jesus in one of its most amiable lights; they display one great design of his appearance in the world, the bringing of men to repentance. This is beautifully and emphatically delineated in the concluding part of the narration: "The
 " Lord turned and looked upon Peter;
 " and Peter remembered the word of the
 " Lord, how he had said to him, Before the
 " cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.
 " And he went out, and wept bitterly *,"

S E C T. IV.

Of his Trial before Pilate.

THE character of Jesus doth not rest on the prejudices and opinion of his countrymen, either in his favour, or to his disadvantage. In attending to the history of his life, we have seen him receiving the most respectful treatment from heathens; in his infancy worshipped by them; and,

* Luke xxii. 61. 62.

in a few instances during his publick ministry, addressed as a divine person.

As the religion of Jesus was to be proposed to the Gentile world, it was highly proper, that the objection against its author should be removed on the score of opposition from his countrymen, who charged him with crimes, and then gave him over to the civil power to be tried and punished. Had the trial of Jesus ended where it began, before the high priest and council of the Jews, it would have been less interesting to the world, and less satisfactory in the issue. But he was tried by a Roman judge, and his innocence, nay his dignity, stand attested by the person, who, through weakness, condemned him *.

* I am inclined to believe, that the compilers of the creed, commonly called the apostle's creed, must have had this circumstance under their eye, as much as to fix the chronology of the death of Jesus; his suffering under Pontius Pilate would determine many to enquire into the particulars of the event, whom mere curiosity would not prompt, or who might have been restrained by their antipathies and indifference.

THE circumstances of abasement, in which Jesus appears on this occasion, are not materially different from those in which he appeared on a former. We see him still in the semblance of a criminal. Perhaps his standing before a heathen judge, might sink him as low in the eye of his enemies, as all the crimes alledged, and all the indignities poured upon him. Allow each of them their full weight; view them in the most mortifying aspect, they are a great deal more than balanced by the following particulars; the appearance of the accusers, of the judge, and of the party accused.

WE have already taken notice of the crimes with which Jesus was loaded by the high priest, and how ill the charge was supported. In attending to these particulars, we would probably feel our indignation kindling. The conduct of the accusers, before the tribunal of Pilate, serves as fuel to increase it.

THE first particular observable in their conduct, is the absurd scrupulosity with which they set about the accusation. When Jesus was led away from Caiphas

into the presence of Pilate, "they themselves would not enter into the judgment hall; lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the passover*." Active malice, and specious hypocrisy, are not, as in this instance, always found in connection. The accusers of Jesus did not act a part on purpose to cover their designs: It is reasonable to imagine, that they were serious, and in earnest. But they had imposed on themselves, or had been deceived into the absurd opinion, that attention to lesser points of duty would atone for the greatest offences. Yet, while their conduct excites our pity, it must fire our indignation. Such compounded characters in ordinary life are justly branded with contempt, and, viewed as the accusers of innocence, must bring contempt on the cause they engage in.

It also deserves notice, that the charge against Jesus is vague and undetermined: "Pilate went out to them, and said, What accusation bring you against this man? They answered and said unto him, If

* John xviii. 28.

“ he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him unto thee *.” In any ordinary cause, where men are straitened for facts to support a charge, they must either invent falsehoods, or keep matters in the dark as much as it is possible. The first of these is too glaring an expedient to set out with. The latter is the more usual resource. When, therefore, in any such case, a person keeps always disguised, though justice to himself, though his interest, and even his passions, demand a contrary conduct, we may certainly conclude, that he is puzzled, or that his intentions are dishonest. The following maxim of Jesus determines what are the genuine features of such conduct, and how they affect us: “ Men love darkness rather than light, their deeds being evil *.”

WE see, with disgust, the accusers of Jesus shifting and varying the charge. First, They accuse him of speaking against the temple, then of blasphemy. Before another court, they accuse him

* John xviii. 29 30. † John iii. 21.

of sedition and disloyalty to Cæsar. There is a simplicity and consistency in truth, which renders it averse to disguise, and which gives it the power of attracting by its own native beauties. On the other hand, falsehood is dissident of itself; it is always varying and changing its aspect. By its various form, one is at a loss what to make of it, though usually in the issue it betrays itself. The light of truth, like the rays of the sun, shines in a steady, and therefore powerful direction. That of deceit resembles the wavering gleam of the meteor, which dazzles for a moment, and then vanishes away.

THE low artifice employed in bringing out the charge, is a circumstance which cannot escape us. The conduct of the accusers was inconsistent, but, at the same time, it betrays an intention to mislead and inflame. Jesus, before the Jewish council, was accused of being an enemy to the temple. What artifice more likely to blow up the resentments, either of the priests, or of the Jewish populace? He was charged before them with blasphemy, a

crime capital by the Jewish law: No expedient could be more successful in hurrying him on to an infamous death. To the Roman judge, these articles of accusation were either unintelligible or uninteresting. To his passions and politics, they therefore address themselves with very great dexterity. They knew how obnoxious the whole nation was to the Roman governors by their seditious humour: They were conscious of their own antipathy to Cæsar and the Romans. Before the tribunal of Pilate, they accuse Jesus of "perverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that "he himself is Christ a King†." This stratagem probably Pilate saw; and, bad as he was in some respects, he seems to have detested it. It was wholly founded in falsehood: Jesus paid tribute to Cæsar, and taught his disciples to do the same. When the multitude sought to make him a king, he withdrew from them into the desert.

THE appearance of Pilate, the judge in this cause, comes next to be examined. It was mortifying to the accusers of Jesus, and reflects a durable lustre on the person and cause, against which their wiles were employed.

THE conduct of Pilate in the course of the trial is indeed weak and irresolute, and, in the issue, Jesus was condemned. But his instability may be urged as a presumptive proof, that Jesus was, in his eye, an innocent person; at least that the charge against him was far from being clear. We can assign no other motive for his not proceeding instantly to condemn him. His private interests and politics were evidently on this side, and the risk was now considerable, to which he exposed himself by his hesitation and reluctance.

PILATE gave Jesus a direct testimony in his favour. Besides, the whole of his conduct seems to have been dictated by the full persuasion both of the innocence and dignity of his character.

THE direct testimony of Pilate is plain and explicit: "I find no fault in this

“man*.” A little time after, “I have
 “found no fault in this man, touching
 “those things whereof ye accuse him†.”
 A third time: “Why, what evil hath he
 “done? I find no cause of death in him‡.”
 And, when no remonstrances on his part
 could stem the tide of the popular rage,
 “he took water and washed his hands be-
 “fore the multitude, saying, I am inno-
 “cent of the blood of this just man, see
 “ye to it||.”

His persuasion that Jesus was a person
 of considerable dignity, is expressed clearly
 by the great decency and respect with
 which he treated him. This is the more
 remarkable, that the manners of Pilate were
 naturally fierce and haughty. His extraor-
 dinary wonder at the silence of Jesus §;
 the manner in which he renewed his ques-
 tions; his own silence when Jesus con-
 fessed himself to be a king; the manner
 in which he engaged in a conversation on

* Luke xxiii. 4.

† v. 14.

‡ v. 22.

|| Matth. xxvii. 24.

§ v. 12. 13. 14.

the subject *; the secret dread which seized him on hearing that Jesus “made himself to be the Son of God †;” his repeated inquiries and the issue of these; his seeking thenceforth to release him; are particulars which express clearly the persuasion of Pilate, that Jesus was both an innocent person, and a person of considerable dignity: A persuasion which we may trace in his whole conduct on this memorable occasion.

ONE particular of this kind presents itself in the beginning of the trial; I mean the discouragement which Pilate gave to the accusation against Jesus, and the manner which he took to discourage it: “Take him,” says he to the Jews, “and judge him according to your law ‡.” Allowing that he hated the Jews, and was disposed, on many occasions, to mortify them; yet, it is evident, that, on other occasions, he was ambitious of their favour. We might suspect his present conduct to have issued from total indifference

* Joh. xvii. 33.—38.

† Joh. xix: 8.

‡ Joh xviii 5. 31.

of temper, or from ignorance of the case, had we not the best evidence to believe the contrary. The stir which was occasioned in Jerusalem by the entry of Jesus, a few days before, amidst the acclamations of the multitude; the schemes formed for seizing him, and the obtaining a band of soldiers for this purpose, make the ignorance of Pilate an improbable conjecture. But he was not only not ignorant of the cause, but had traced the secret springs of the accusation: "He knew that the Jews for envy had delivered him." Allowing that his proposal to the accusers was evasive; allowing that it was criminal to reject their applications; yet to what source can we trace this strange averfeness to engage in a cause where he could lose nothing by taking one side, the side of the accusers, and where, by taking the other, it was certain he would incur their displeasure, except to the strong bias of his mind in favour of Jesus?

THIS secret persuasion of his mind concerning Jesus is also clearly indicated, by

the variety of expedients which he made use of to save him. Pilate had no secret interest to serve by indulging the favourable bias of his mind. Nor is it conceivable that he would have used extraordinary expedients, unless to serve his interest, or to gratify his persuasion. The variety of these expedients shows how much he had the safety of Jesus at heart. One expedient fails; he is not disconcerted, but has recourse to another: This also failing, to a third. And, when his whole stock of ingenuity is exhausted, we see it miraculously, at least providentially, supplied *.

THE lengthening out of the trial and examination of Jesus, was doubtless one of these expedients. Summary procedure in any criminal cause is always constructed to be unfavourable for the person accused, especially if humour and resentment bear a part in the accusation. On these prompters, strict law and justice can lay no restraint: For this reason the judge who attempts to restrain or to check

* By the message from his wife.

them in their career, must be supposed to be grossly partial, or to be biaſſed by the strong indications of injustice on one ſide, and of innocence on the other. In the preſent caſe, it is evident, that Pilate ſaw the aim of the accuſers. He knew by what paſſions they were prompted, and was much diſpoſed to mortify them. This laſt aſſertion appears, from the reſpectful manner in which he treated Jeſus, from their frequent conferences, and, above all, from the reiterated representations made in his favour. Preſſed by the accuſers to condemn him, Pilate hesitates, deliberates, remonſtrates; on purpoſe to cool the fire of their rage, and reduce them to reaſon. In this light, the teſtimony which Pilate gave to Jeſus muſt appear highly honourable. It diſcovers itſelf to have iſſued from no ſudden freak or ſally of attachment. After three ſucceſſive examinations, he could firmly declare, that he “ found no fault in him,” and, by ſending him to Herod, was enabled to add the weight of Herod’s opinion to his own: “ No, nor yet Herod,” cruel and arbitrary as he was, “ for I ſent you to him, and lo,

“ nothing worthy of death is done unto
 “ him *.”

THAT Pilate had it much at heart to release Jesus, appears from the choice of a competitor with him for releasement. Of this matter, the sacred historian gives the following account : “ Now, at that feast, “ the governor was wont to release to the “ people a prisoner, whom they would. And “ they had then a notable prisoner called “ Barrabas† ”. Another historian gives us further light into his character and crime, “ who, for sedition in the city, and for “ murder, had been cast into prison‡.” A more favourable competition scarcely could have occurred ; and, because it was so favourable, Pilate eagerly grasping at it. Almost every circumstance in the history of Barrabas determines against the probability of his having the popular preference. It is probable that he had been always a mean or infamous person. His crimes were infamous, such as excite the detestation, nay, even the horror of the

* Luke xxiii. 15.

† Matth. xxvii 16. 15.

‡ Luke xxiii. 19.

public. His crimes were recent; committed before their eyes : Jerusalem itself had been the theatre of his riot and bloodshed. The country of Judea was at this time much infested with robbers and murderers : The evil was every day on the encrease. In the journeyings of the people, to the great annual solemnity, they were exposed to this danger : In short, town and country were kept in constant alarm. Here then was the man claiming no protection, and the most unlikely to be screened by popular caprice or favour; and this was the man put in competition with Jesus. Pilate had formed his plan of proceeding, and chose his season for unfolding it : “ Therefore, “ when they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, Whom will ye that “ I release unto you ? Barrabas, or Jesus “ which is called Christ ? For he knew “ that, for envy, they had delivered “ him *.”

HAVING dealt thus with their reason, we see him next applying to the compas-

* Matth. xxvii. 17 18.

sion of the multitude. Allowing the expedient to be awkward, ill judged, or even ridiculous, neither of which it is; yet it shows how greatly Pilate was interested in the releasement of Jesus. An historian informs us, that "Herod and his soldiers set him at nought, and clothed him in gorgeous apparel*." Another, that "they plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head. And they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews†." All these indignities were the effects of wanton cruelty, and insolent scorn. Pilate takes hold of the situation of Jesus, to attempt again his releasement: "He went forth again, and saith to them, Behold I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault with him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the purple robe, and the crown of thorns. And Pilate saith to them, Behold the man." Pilate felt compassion from the sight of an innocent person suffering such indignities, the forerunners of a cruel death; and the prospect seems to

* Luke xxiii 12.

† John xiv. 2.

have been full in his eye, when he exposed Jesus to the spectators as an object of pity. Perhaps this Roman had seen, or had heard, that his generous countrymen, even on a day of triumph, could weep for the fate of those captives whom their arms had subdued. Perhaps he looked for effects from the pity of the multitude, which their reason was too weak to produce. But their minds were contracted by prejudice, and hardened with ungenerous enmity. Hence, this scene of humiliation had the effect only of inflaming them the more, and of rendering the patient sufferer more contemptible in their eyes.

PILATE concludes the trial with a solemn and significant action: "He took water, and washed his hands before the multitude." No words could have expressed more firmly his persuasion, that Jesus was innocent of the crimes laid to his charge. Nay, the action is equivalent to a protestation in his favour. The words which accompanied the action express this, and a great deal more. They are addressed to the accusers of Jesus, and

contain in them a warning of their horrid guilt and danger : “ I am innocent of the “ blood of this just person. See ye to “ it *.” Whether or not Pilate spake oracularly, it is unnecessary to determine ; but his admonition was justified by the event. He was prompted, undoubtedly, both in his acting and speaking, by his own convictions, and also by the extraordinary message which he received from his wife, while sitting on the tribunal : “ Have thou nothing to do with this “ just man ; for I have suffered many “ things this night in a dream because “ of him †.” Had the persuasion of Pilate rested on this circumstance, it is easy to see, that he must have been stigmatized in these latter ages as an enthusiast, and his wife as a mere visionary. The character of Pilate, when examined, will secure him against this charge. In the mean time, let it be observed, that dreams were looked upon, even in that age ‡, just as they had been from the earliest ages of

* Matth. xxvii. 24. † Verse 19. ‡ Instance of Calpurnia.

the world*, as mediums of intercourse betwixt the divinity and mortals.

THESE circumstances in the testimony of Pilate, not only render it unexceptionable, but give it a weight and force proportioned to the subject of it, and throw a lustre over this whole scene of ignominy.

LET us next attend to the conduct of the trial; for, on this circumstance, a good deal depends. It may be observed, that the trial of Jesus before Pilate was legal and open. It is always an advantage to a good cause to be openly and publicly tried, whatever is the treatment it meets with. Posterity claims the privilege of rejudging the sentence, and they can do it more impartially in consequence of being disintangled from those attachments and averfions which sway the heart, and embarrass the judgment. The particulars which occur in this trial are various and interesting. We despise the motives which urged on the trial. We pity and apologize for the embarrassment of the

* Old Testament. Homer.

judge. We collect every circumstance with coolness, and proceed to give sentence. Had the trial of Jesus been less public, or less circumstantial, it would have been less satisfactory. But, by its openness and formality, every suspicion is removed that could invalidate the testimony given by the judge in his favour.

THE testimony of Pilate has the greater merit, that he was possessed of no original prejudices on the side of Jesus. Had he been a disciple, or had he been favourably affected to his cause, scripture-history would not have been silent; nor would the enemies of Jesus have submitted the cause to his decision. Jesus was tried by the high priest and council of the Jews, who as judges had proceeded with indecent rapidity. Here we see him tried by an impartial judge. Hence, his opinion of him, though he had not courage to support it, must be entirely unexceptionable; nay, it has a strong claim to our regard. Pilate had his prejudices too, as we shall presently observe; but they were not of a side with his opinion. It appears

from his whole conduct, that, had he not been swayed by what he heard, and by what he observed during the course of the trial, he would have been wholly unconcerned about the issue. The weakness and fluctuation of his conduct, is an evidence of the coolness with which he set out; which nothing less than the persuasion of his mind could conquer; the full persuasion that Jesus was an innocent and an extraordinary person.

IN estimating the merit of Pilate's testimony, we must necessarily take into the account his personal character. Some lines of it may be traced in his behaviour during the course of the trial. In the conclusion, we see him condemning or giving up a person, of whose innocence he was persuaded. and which he had openly attested. By other channels of information, we learn that he was an impious man, haughty and inflexible in his temper and manners. This last stricture of his character we have from Philo the Jew *. Of his impiety, Josephus gives the

* De legatione ad Caium,

two following instances: One of them, his attempt of introducing into Jerusalem some bucklers, on which was stamped the image of Cæsar; an abomination to the Jews, and done in disrespect to the object of their worship: The other his laying out the treasure of the temple in making expensive aqueducts*. Scripture-history gives an instance both of his impiety and cruelty; the instance of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices †. But may it not be said, to what doth all this amount? Doth the immorality or impiety of a judge give weight to his opinion? Ought it not to have a contrary effect? This is true; yet, in the present case, one advantage manifestly results from this circumstance. From thence we are convinced, that, in the favourable opinion which Pilate formed of Jesus, he was not urged by constitutional enthusiasm, on one hand, nor by the weakness of pity on the other, not swayed by the delicacy of a virtuous mind, but overawed by that reverence of virtue, which

* Jewish wars, Book 2 chap. 9. † Luke xiii. 1

it often inspires into the very worst of men.

THE testimony of Pilate will be found to derive merit from an examination of his interests and prejudices. If it shall appear, that, in his attempts to release Jesus, he had no private interests to serve, on the contrary, that he endangered them, we are under the necessity of forming conclusions very much to the honour of his conduct. It will require no force of argument to prove, that Pilate, by his conduct, could not intend to gratify his avarice. The disciples of Jesus were but few in number, and almost all of them were as poor as their master. We have already acquitted him of the suspicion of enthusiasm, or effeminacy. Nor was he inclinable to too great moderation in the use of power. The instances of oppression already taken notice of, with which he entered on his government, acquit him from this suspicion; and, by all the haughtiness of authority, his whole administration was characterized. From a person fond of power, and in a seditious country, we naturally expect

the utmost rigour in punishing crimes, and the punishing them without hesitation.

As little can we suppose that the testimony of Pilate was dictated by the motives of adding reputation to his government, and of acquiring popular applause. By thinking and speaking favourably on the side of the innocent sufferer, he greatly endangered both. Jesus was dilated by his countrymen, "as a perverter of the nation, a raiser of sedition, forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, That he himself was Christ a King." The danger was not the less, that the charge was false or misrepresented: It was enough that the credulous multitude believed it to be true. But it is of importance to observe the superiority of Pilate upon this occasion to almost every consideration affecting his interest, the fear of being called to an account by a jealous master, and the fear of disobliging a capricious and resentful people. They were capable of saying to Pilate, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend;" and were capable of misrepresenting him, in case of his conduct falling

short of their cruel wishes *. In this situation, critical to the credit, and to the duration of his power, did Pilate testify to the innocence, to the dignity of Jesus, in the face of accusers as dangerous to the judge as to the criminal, and in the face of accusations properly framed to work on his prejudices and interest. When we see him, after all, giving up Jesus, we must not be surprized. Such cases occur in ordinary life. Men are often straitened, perhaps tortured by their principles, yet as often they defy them; drawn by their persuasions one way, and by their politics another. Pilate wished to release Jesus: He used every expedient to release him, from the full persuasion, that he was a person both of innocence and of dignity: And though, "from willingness to content the

* It has been already observed, that Pilate treated the Jews with haughtiness. But it is also to be observed, in order to prepare us for the issue of the trial, that, in the progress of his government, he found it necessary to study popular favour, and attempted by some mean condescensions to secure it: In spite of all which, by the murmurs of the people, he was obliged to return to Rome to defend himself against their accusations.

“people, he delivered him up,” which is all the account we have of this matter; yet his persuasion remained entire, and he took care to notify it in the most public manner.

It is unnecessary to offer an excuse for insisting, with some minuteness, on the conduct of Pilate. As judge in the trial of Jesus, his appearance is extraordinary. What sense the primitive church had of this matter, we learn from the following words of one of its fathers: “Nota, “quod in Pilato et uxore ejus, justum “Dominum confitentibus, gentilis populi testimonium est.” By the same channel, we are informed, that Pilate wrote on the subject to the Emperor Tiberius, who laid the whole transaction before the Roman senate, and gave it a place in the annals of his administration. The manner in which the fathers of the church speak of Pilate is remarkable: “Ipse Pilatus pro sua conscientia Christianus *.”

JESUS appeared before the Roman judge in the semblance of a criminal. He was called

* See Bishop Pearson on the creed, 4th article in the notes.

upon to defend himself against the allegations of his accusers. The dignity of his behaviour is observable both on the occasions of his silence, and of the replies made to the questions put to him.

THERE are situations in common life in which silence has a language which no powers of eloquence can express. Such is the silence of grief, or of indignation. The mind, while agitated by either of these passions, is in danger of exceeding all bounds. Hence the imposing a restraint, the stemming the tide, while raging with violence, must strike as a great and noble exertion. The silence of a virtuous person suffering by the iniquity of the times, and on account of his virtues, must strike us in this light. It is true, that consciousness of desert is the best support in the hour of trial. But it is also true, that worthy minds, by their virtuous sensibility, are most susceptible of the impression of injury. Hence it is easy to see, how Jesus must have been affected by the accusations of his enemies, how great the provocation to break silence, and how great

the dignity displayed in commanding it. A conduct so uncommon and sublime, that it attracted the observation of the judge, and perhaps formed an early prejudice in his favour: "Hearest thou not," says Pilate to Jesus, "How many things "they witness against thee? But he answered him to never a word, inasmuch "that the governor marvelled greatly *?"

JESUS was not only tried as a criminal; the accusation against him issued from malice, and was supported by falsehood: A new circumstance which dignifies his silence. The man who, when unjustly accused, opens his mouth in his own defence, is deemed only to do himself a piece of justice. To sustain the load, and not to complain, to deny one's self this inherent privilege, must indicate a soul raised greatly above the ordinary level. There is indeed a sullen or a scornful silence, which is natural to men of a certain complexion: But the existence of this is no discredit to the former. The silence of Jesus on the present occasion is best interpreted by the tenor of

* Matth. xvi. 13. 14.

his conversation in the world, which was uniformly patient, calm, and unshaken. It indicates an unconcern about personal safety, which innocence alone can inspire. It indicates the idea of some grand or benevolent schemes engrossing the attention. Jesus was not merely innocent ; he went about doing good. He had not yet finished his work. He had determined to sacrifice himself for the happiness of mankind. Hence he said not a word in his own defence, when legally called upon, when he was as unjustly as maliciously accused of “ perverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself was Christ a king *.”

MUCH has been said of the power of eloquence, and great are the effects which it has sometimes produced. It has softened the most tyrannical natures, and has converted enemies into friends. That these arts were not practised on this occasion, cannot be imputed to a consciousness of defect. For it is not to be doubted, that

* Luke xxiii. 2.

he who commanded the admiration even of enemies, when proposing his doctrine, could exert the same powers of persuasion when his life was at stake. Jesus knew that Pilate would fain have released him; yet he would not avail himself of this advantage on his side. Nay, he was silent when the judge kindly intreated him to stand on his defence.

ON some occasions we find Jesus replying to the questions of his judge. Yet, in these replies, we may observe a propriety and dignity in the choice both of the occasions and of the matter of the reply.

ON one occasion, Pilate asks if he was a king? Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world." A reply sufficient to dispell all political jealousy on the part of the judge, as well as to invalidate the charge of the accusers. This began a conversation on the subject, in which the curiosity of Pilate was wonderfully excited. Jesus does no more to gratify it, than only to give him such an opening into the nature of his kingdom as the present circumstances could admit. For the rest, he refers him to the event. Pi-

late furnished him with an occasion by the mention of his power. Jesus calmly and greatly replies, "Thou couldest have no power at all over me, except it were given thee from above *."

JESUS was called upon by his judge to give testimony to the truth. On this occasion he was not silent or reluctant. Pilate asked him, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Thou sayest †." A reply which did not awaken the jealousy of the Roman, nor in any degree offended him. He immediately declared, "I find no fault in this man ‡." Perhaps, the reply may pass unobserved by some, or may be despised by others, on account of its simplicity. But a person of good sense will perceive a dignity in this very circumstance, beyond what the greatest variety or glare of words can communicate. In this light, the apostles viewed it, when transcribing the life of their master. The apostle Paul seems to have felt its power. "Who before Pontius Pilate wit-

* John xix. 11. † Luke xxiii. 3. ‡ Ver. 4.

“needed a good confession *.” What other confession could have been meant, it is not easy to see. But even this deserves the highest commendation, viewed as a testimony which Jesus gave to the truth, and which he soon after confirmed by his blood.

SOME learned men have found in the course of this trial no less than three witnesses supporting the cause and character of Jesus: Not only Pilate, but his wife, and Herod to whom the cause was referred. Pilate and Herod had been at open variance. On this occasion, they were made friends, and acted in concert. So that Pilate who was a heathen, and Herod who was a Jew, had an opportunity of searching to the bottom of every particular; and, from their joint inquiries, we derive the fullest satisfaction.

BUT there is one witness whose testimony is not of small weight, though he appeared not in the course of the trial; I mean Judas the traitor: When he saw that Jesus was

condemned, " he repented himself, and
 " brought again the thirty pieces of silver,
 " to the chief priests and elders, saying, I
 " have sinned, in that I have betrayed the
 " innocent blood *." There can be no
 doubt, that this person had almost every
 motive to smother his conviction. In the
 confession which he made, he evidently
 contradicted his darling passion, the love
 of money: " He cast down the pieces of
 " silver, and departed †." He acted in
 contradiction to every ambitious pro-
 spect, by renouncing the friendship of the
 powerful enemies of his master. He acted
 against that respect which every man
 owes to his own reputation, by confes-
 sing himself the betrayer of innocent
 blood. Nay, in the testimony which he
 gave to the innocence of Jesus, he seems
 to have risen above the natural love of
 life; since it is not to be doubted that he
 gave it in the prospect of laying hands
 on himself. Yet this dreadful step he
 could not take, till, by an ample and un-
 forced confession, he had done all that lay

* Matth. xxvii. 3. † v. 5.

in his power to wipe off the aspersion, which his crime had thrown on the head of his much injured master, and had given him, almost with his dying breath, the united testimony of a traitor, and of a friend.

THE importance of our having such an uncommon testimony in the cause of Jesus is obvious. If Judas had been possessed of any criminal secrets, or facts which were of importance to be concealed from the world, he would have betrayed them, together with the person of his master; or he must have produced them at this season, to allay the horrors of his mind. It appears, that he was destitute of any such resource. He had nothing to produce except the public declaration of his own crime, and of the integrity of him whose confidence he had abused: A declaration as indelible, as it is beyond the reach of suspicion, being handed down to posterity in the history of his unhappy exit, and rendered conspicuous in that age, by the absurd and hypocritical measures taken by the abettors of his perfidy. Judas, before he dispatched himself, had returned to

the chief priests and elders the reward of his crime. They would not receive the money back into the treasury; because it was the price of blood: "And they took council, and bought with it the potters field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore, that field was called the field of blood unto this day*."

S E C T. V.

Of the Crucifixion.

THIS concluding scene in the sufferings of Jesus, is one of the most important and interesting: As a subject of discourse, there is none perhaps, where the powers of eloquence have fuller room to operate. In support of this assertion, we may appeal to the number of eloquent discourses which have been spoken or published on the subject.

THE plan of these observations allows no room for illustrating every particular,

* Matth. xxvii. 7 8.

which the subject suggests. It confines me to an examination of the circumstances of abasement and of grandeur, which, on this occasion, enter into the appearance of Jesus. For, let the humbling circumstances be stated ever so strong, yet they are counterpoised by others of a different kind, which serve both to excite our attention and admiration.

INDEED, to the eye of the world, no appearance could be more ignominious, than that of Jesus led out to Calvary; accompanied by the sorrowful few who bemoaned his fate; and by the scornful multitude, who had hurried it on by their importunity; nailed up to a cross betwixt two malefactors; insulted in his distress by great and small, by enemies, spectators, and even by one of his fellow-sufferers; forsaken of men, and even seemingly forsaken of God. This is an appearance dark and melancholy, when viewed on one side. On another, it is all bright and attracting. The very circumstances of abasement are cloathed with a lustre which distinguishes them; the whole appearance is enlightened by a

display of the sublime, as well as of the humble virtues, and by the testimonies both of heaven and of earth, in behalf of the illustrious sufferer.

THE appearance of Jesus, bearing his cross, followed by the company, who lamented him, introduces with great propriety the crucifixion itself. This incident is abasing and affecting; but while it moves our pity, our admiration is excited.

EVEN the sorrow of the attendants serves to dignify the scene. It is observed by a learned critic, that "the Jews bewailed not him that went to be executed; but only mourned inwardly for him. They bewailed him not; because his disgrace might be his expiation*." In this light we must interpret the tears of the company, not only as a mark of affection, but as a distinguished piece of homage to the innocence of Jesus; as a testimony from them who gave it, that he was a good man, though going out to suffer as a deceiver of the peo-

* Lightfoot on Luke xxiii 37.

ple. On the subject of his character, the multitude had been divided formerly. On this occasion, we observe a revival of their sentiments in his favour. We see them in effect emitting a testimony, in circumstances, where it was least to be expected, and which nothing less could produce than the fixed persuasion of their minds. But then, how nobly is this testimony supported by the conduct of Jesus? With what dignity and presence does he behave? He makes no attempts to avail himself of their favour, on purpose to incense them against his prosecutors; no representations on the side of his own cause, or of their malice and injustice: he feels no passions but those of the most generous love, and of the most tender pity. His sufferings, though great and deeply felt, were overbalanced in his mind by a more general calamity. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children*."

* John xi. 49. 5.

THE imagination cannot conceive an appearance more abasing, than that of Jesus on the cross, enduring the severest pain, and exposed to the rudest indignities: Yet circumstances are not wanting, which adorn and exalt it. In producing these, I shall observe, as nearly as is possible, the order of the history.

THE title fixed to the cross, is the first circumstance offering itself to our observation. It was customary among the Romans, to notify in this public manner the offence of the criminal: Jesus had been charged with divers crimes in the course of his trial, first, before the Jewish high priest, and afterwards before the Roman judge. Pilate, having involuntarily condemned him, writes an inscription, and fixes it to the cross: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." He causes the title to be inscribed in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages, that all then present might understand and know that for no crime of his own Jesus suffered. Pilate had thrice pronounced him innocent, in

the course of the trial. At last he makes the cross itself proclaim his innocence and dignity. We are not surprised, that his conduct gave offence to the Jews, as it expressed so strongly a disapprobation of their sentiments. They apply to Pilate to have the title changed. He adheres to his own deed with a firmness which does him honour, even after giving Jesus into their power, when persuaded of his innocence. The steadiness of Pilate on this occasion will not be a mystery, when we view it in connection with his whole preceeding conduct. It shows, that, to the last, he was consistent with himself in his sentiments of Jesus; even when he beheld him in a situation the most ignominious.

It is more important to observe, that the cross of Jesus is adorned and aggrandized by his conduct as a sufferer. It is a just remark, that virtue never shines so bright as in adversity. There is something peculiarly awful and respectable, in the passive virtues. A person in great distress naturally attracts us: But his behaviour in distress,

his magnanimity, and his other virtues, are the objects which excite our admiration. Nay we admire him, even tho' infamy be an ingredient in his sufferings, if they are nobly supported. We would have despised, and have been ashamed of the unhappy Perseus, from our knowledge of his character, had we seen him led in triumph as a captive thro' Rome; whereas Socrates sentenced to die, is a respectable figure. But, in the appearance of Jesus as a sufferer, there is a blaze of virtues, if we may so speak, which throws light and lustre every where around it. If he was to appearance forsaken of heaven, we also see his trust exercised in the most critical of all situations. If we see him insulted by men, not a word, not a sentiment escapes him, but what is expressive of dignity. Nay, his very silence, through this whole scene, has a gracefulness and majesty beyond what all the powers of language can reach. On this single point we might, if there was any necessity, rest the issue of our examination.

THE silence of Jesus on the cross, is dignified by the provocations and insolence of the spectators. It has been the custom of civilized nations to express some degree of sympathy with the most atrocious offenders, when doing homage to the laws, by their exemplary punishment: I mean in cases of capital offence. This custom seems to be founded both on equity and humanity, the ties of which, not guilt itself can dissolve. Let any one attend to the indignities offered to Jesus on the cross, from almost every quarter, and he will be at no loss in concluding, that his silence was great and becoming: "They that passed by, reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying: Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the Scribes and Elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come

“down from the cross, and we will believe on him *.” And the soldiers also “mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou “be the King of the Jews, save thyself †.” And one of the malefactors, which were “hanged, railed on him, saying, If thou “be Christ, save thyself and us ‡.” The indignities poured on the head of Jesus require no artificial colouring in order to heighten them. At the same time they contain all these materials of provocation, by which an innocent or virtuous mind is most easily inflamed. By such an exertion of divine power, as he had displayed in his life, he could have easily confounded the insolence and audacity of his enemies. His refusing to exert that power when called upon, and when he could have done it with ease, gives a finishing to his behaviour, and exalts it many degrees beyond the size of humanity.

THE silence of Jesus on the cross is

* Matth. xxvii. 39. † Luke xxiii. 36. ‡ Ver 39.

not more admirable, than the occasions of his interrupting it. These occur in the beginning, and towards the conclusion of the scene. They respect either his friends, his fellow-sufferers, or his enemies.

THE words which Jesus spake from the cross respecting his enemies, stand first in the order of the history ; and these give a bright display of his grace and majesty. There is often a gloom in silence, which, like a cloud, overcasts the countenance, and indicates a troubled state of the soul. It is seldom an indication of inward serenity, and may alternately express the language of indignation and despair. From the grossness of the indignities poured out on this occasion, we would expect some expressions of anger or disdain, had it been the case of an ordinary person. Jesus was characterised in his life, " full of grace and truth." In this amiable and attracting aspect, we behold him at his dying hour. He is not only superior to every resentful

feeling of ill usage, but he prays, he interceeds in behalf of the instruments of it: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do *." It is observable, that he spake these words as soon as he was fixed to the cross. Perhaps they refer immediately to the executioners, but no doubt were meant to include all his enemies. They explain his silent submission to their indignities, and give a force to his own command, which no argument could impart: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you; and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you †."

The next occasion on which Jesus spake from the cross, respects his fellow-sufferers. It has been already mentioned as one of the abasing circumstances in his sufferings, that he was crucified betwixt two thieves. It also gave a sting to his humiliation, to be insulted by one of them: Yet this indignity is compensated by the rebuke of the other, by his testi-

* Luke xxiii. 24.

† Matth. v. 44.

mony to the innocence of Jesus, and by his humble yet fervent application to him in the character of a deliverer; "Dost thou not fear God," says he to the railer, "seeing thou art under the same condemnation? and we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss *." From the views of the innocence of Jesus, how beautifully doth he rise to the dignity of his character, to which he pays the most affectionate homage of duty and reliance, when every appearance was against him? "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom †." We have observed the grace and beauty with which Jesus received the applications made to him during the course of his ministry. Here we may observe the same manner displayed in very different circumstances. Every particular which heightens the value of the request, reflects a merit on the manner of granting it. How beautiful the contrast betwixt the

* Luke xxii. 40. 41.

† Luke xxiii. 42.

infamy of the cross, and the being with Jesus in paradise? betwixt the tediousness of a lingering death, and the suddenness of the deliverance? betwixt the view of Jesus dying as a criminal, and the view of him, as the Lord of life, and of glory? There are fine sayings of great men in distress, which, though spoken many ages ago, excite our admiration. Remember that thou sufferest with Phocion, said the hero to a fellow-sufferer complaining of his fate: Remember that thou art carrying the fortune of Cæsar, said the conqueror to the trembling pilot, in a storm at sea. The figure of Jesus on this occasion is incomparably more grand. We see him from his cross, in the midst of agonies and insults, reviving his fellow-sufferer, with a declaration more important than ever was uttered by a prince from his throne: "Verily, I say unto thee, To day thou shalt be with me in paradise *".

NOTHING can be more amiable, or graceful, than the behaviour of Jesus on this

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* Luke xxiii. 43.

occasion, to his friends. From the cross he cast an eye on his mother ; he addresses her, and delivers her in charge to his disciple and friend. This is an abasing circumstance in the death of Jesus. He suffered in the presence of his friends, before whom one naturally wishes not to appear despicable, and whose sorrow could not fail to be an aggravation of his own. Yet this circumstance is enlightened by the beauty of character which it gave occasion to display. There stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and the disciple whom he loved : " When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, " he said to his mother, Woman, behold " thy Son. Then saith he to the disciple, " Behold thy mother*." Some great men have shown, at the approach of death, their usual serenity, and a more than ordinary attention to their surviving friends. But neither our own observa-

* It has been observed, that it was customary, even in that age, for persons in the prospect of death to bequeath a near relation to another as a memorial and pledge of friendship. See Pliny's letters.

tion, nor the page of the historian, can furnish us with such an instance of dignity as that which is here exhibited. The ardours of affection and the attentions of friendship are seldom to be found in a breast overwhelmed with sorrow, or racked with the feeling of pain. Human nature seems to require all advantages on its side, when called forth to its more delicate exertions. The situation of Jesus was as unfavourable for them, as we can suppose; yet we see them operating with an amiableness which charms, and with a dignity which astonishes. He saw and felt the disconsolate sorrow of his friends: Only a few moments intervened before he expired. The grand objects which at this time possessed his soul did not disqualify him for descending to the lowest. Such are the limits of human nature, that none except noble minds are capable of such an extensive attention: While great objects employ our thoughts, lesser ones escape us. It is beautiful to observe how Jesus concluded his life as he had begun it, by giving a testimony in favour of fi-

lial piety ; consigning his mother into the hands of his beloved friend, only a few moments before, he said to God, “ Father, “ into thy hands I commend my spirit *.”

THE abasement of the present scene is also dignified by the prodigies which accompanied it. One historian informs us, that, “ from the sixth to the ninth hour “ there was darkness over all the land †.” Soon after Jesus expired †. “ Immediately “ the vail of the temple was rent from the “ top to the bottom, the earth did quake, “ the rocks rent, and the graves were opened ||.” To suppose that the sun should be miraculously eclipsed, as we are informed by heathen and scripture authority it then was ; to suppose that these extraordi-

* Luke xxiii. 46, and John xix. 30. compared. This last was an act of trust, which counterpoises fully the seeming despair with which it was preceeded: “ My God, my God, why hast thou “ forsaken me ?” Matth. xxvii. 46.

† Matth. xxvii. 45. ‡ Ver. 50. || Ver. 51. The piety of Jesus on the cross has been the subject of many excellent discourses, which renders the illustration of it, in this place, unnecessary.

nary appearances in nature which immediately followed should happen at the very moment when Jesus died on the cross; and yet to maintain that they stand in no connection with that event, would be harsh and unnatural. Men, whose minds are enlightened by the gospel, affect to be more nice in admitting the credibility or propriety of extraordinary facts, than in earlier ages of the world. Perhaps these have run too far into one extreme: But the other extreme is equally dangerous. The prodigies which adorn the cross of Jesus have still an evident significancy in them. The union of the Jewish and Gentile world, an august and mysterious event which the gospel was about to accomplish, could not be opened with more majesty than by the rending of the vail of the temple; nor could the general resurrection, a capital doctrine of the gospel, be conveyed with more propriety, than by the graves opening, and the dead coming forth. These events may be allowed to have had some remote aspects: But there is one which unquestionably lies nearer;

even the testimony which God was pleased to give by their means in favour of the illustrious sufferer.

JESUS, in the depths of his humiliation on the cross, is confessed to be the Son of God. The confession came from the mouth of the Roman Centurion, who, in the unavoidable discharge of his duty, had witnessed the whole transaction from the beginning to the end. We have all the reason in the world to believe, that the confession issued from the conviction of his mind, and that no external motive, nothing but what he saw or heard, compelled him to make it. His prejudices as a Roman must have rather inclined him to judge unfavourably of one dying the death of a slave. As the subject and servant of Cæsar, his honour was concerned in giving no support to the declared enemy and rival of his master. There are prejudices in human nature to the disadvantage of the unhappy: On this occasion they bade fair to operate with success: But unbiaſſed reason and sober good sense hold them at defiance. Perhaps the Centurion had seen, or had heard

of the brighter parts of the life of Jesus, when he wrought miracles, and was adored by the multitudes. Very probably he knew that, for envy, the Jews had delivered him. He had an opportunity of observing minutely the dignified behaviour of Jesus on the cross, amidst the insults of his enemies. Hence he must have been in the best disposition, and furnished with the most proper lights, for explaining and judging of the present uncommon appearance. The Romans were a people highly susceptible of such impressions as these prodigies had a tendency to produce. The Centurion had no Jewish no party prejudices to struggle with, such as might have stifled his convictions in their birth; so that we may suppose him to have followed the unbiaſſed dictates of his mind, when, from what he ſaw, he declared, “ Truly, this was the Son of “ God.” *

* Matth. xxvii. 54. A heathen writer is quoted for having ſaid, on occaſion of the miraculous eclipse, “ Either the world is about to end, or the Son of “ God is ſuffering.”

THIS scene is aggrandized by the confusion and horror which seized the spectators. Had the impressions which it made been confined to one person, we might be apt to think lightly of them. That they were almost universal, puts to silence every suspicion and doubt: "All the people," says the historian, "that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*" It is true, that they uttered no confession of their sentiments in words, as the Centurion did; but their anguish is both eloquent and expressive. The Roman, as we observed, had no religious prejudices to distress him. The Jewish spectators on one hand, were tortured with their hopes of a triumphant Messiah; on the other, with their reflection on the outrages of which they had been guilty. Perhaps many of these persons had admired the doctrine of Jesus, or had been the spectators of his miracles: Perhaps some were of the same multitude who would have

* Matth. xxvii. 55.

made him a king, or who had lately received him into Jerusalem with their joyful acclamations. Could we suppose any event capable of reviving these impressions, it is easy to see, how they must have been stung with remorse. But no events could be more favourable to such a revival, than the miracles of the cross, already taken notice of, both from the resemblance which some of them bore to the miracles of Jesus, and from their threatening aspect on the whole nation of the Jews.

THE respect shown to the dead body of Jesus on the cross, perhaps may be viewed as an incident too trivial, or too accidental, to deserve any notice. That the bones of the two other sufferers should be broken, and that the body of Jesus should escape this treatment, would pass for a matter of pure chance, had not an historian informed us, that it happened by a special direction: "A bone of him shall not be broken." An intimation, that his lifeless body was under the protection of heaven, and perhaps a presage,

that it would be still so, when consigned to the tomb.

THE honours of the tomb, however, are greatly to the purpose. They not only distinguish him from an ordinary sufferer, but in some measure compensate the indignities of the cross. Every one knows with how little ceremony, even in civilized countries, malefactors are interred. The learned inform us, that the Jews had a spot of ground appropriated to this purpose. There the body of Jesus would have been lodged, had not providence or its instruments interposed. That body which was to be rescued from the grave, was first of all rescued from the ignominy of a wretched funeral: A circumstance which no doubt had the effect of making its resurrection the more illustrious. Every particular, which does honour to the persons interposing, reflects it in the issue upon the object of their care. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were persons considerable by their rank and station in the world: The one a counsellor, and a rich man;

the other a ruler of the Jews: The one, "a good man and just, who had not consented to the deed" by which Jesus suffered; the other had come early to Jesus, confessing him to be a teacher sent of God. Hitherto they had been only private disciples, for fear of the Jews. Here they openly avow an attachment, which exposed them not only to censure but scorn; an attachment which could only issue from the full conviction, that Jesus was no impostor, and perfectly innocent of those crimes with which his enemies had charged him. Joseph applies to Pilate for the body, lays it in his new tomb, hewn out of the rock, wherein man had never been laid, and, together with Nicodemus, and the rest of the attendants, performs the funeral obsequies with the most pious care *.

THE tomb of Jesus is a scene of darkness and abasement: Yet it was enlightened by the precaution of his enemies, as well as by the attention of his friends: I mean the precaution taken for securing his

* Matth. xxvii. 57. John xix 38.

body, and for preventing his rising again. The chief Priests and Pharisees apply to Pilate for a guard. We know the pretence which they used for making the application, ‘ lest his disciples come and “steal him away by night, and say to the “people, He is risen from the dead *.” This was the avowed reason of the application ; if there was a secret reason, it must have been the fear or suspicion that Jesus might actually rise. It is not unnatural or unreasonable to suppose, that a nation so superstitious as the Jews, should have their minds much affected with the extraordinary transactions of the day, the prodigies which happened, the declaration of the Roman centurion, and the universal horror of the spectators. It may be alledged, that we charge these persons with absurdity, in supposing them first under the power of their senses, and yet taking measures to prevent what in that view was impossible to

* Mat. xxvii. 64.

be prevented. Such inconsistencies sometimes occur in ordinary life. We see men engaging in a weak, or wicked cause, full of despair as to success, yet exerting themselves to the utmost, and from despair driven to very absurd resources. The enemies of Jesus were acquainted with his prediction, that he was to rise again*. They had no reason to regard the event as an absolute impossibility. They knew by unquestionable evidence, that he had raised others from the grave. When notice was brought them by the soldiers of what had happened at the sepulchre, they appear to have been very much disconcerted; and their confusion, when assembled in council, did drive them on to a most ridiculous and infamous expedient: "They gave large money to the soldiers, saying, say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away, while we slept†." Shall we be fur-

* Matth. xxvii. 63.

† Matth. xxviii. 13. 14. The absurdity and falshood of this device require no serious illustration;

prized that the soldiers should engage to smother the truth for a bribe? Shall we wonder at their engaging in a task so hazardous, and so dishonourable, when the whole national interest was engaged to support and protect them? "If this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you."

THE scene of the cross is almost the only one in which the Apostles of Jesus, from the time of his calling them, bear no part. His prediction was now accomplished, delivered in their hearing: "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be

these qualities being at once discernible in every particular. *First*, it proceeds on the supposition of what shall afterwards prove to be false, that the disciples expected the resurrection of their master. *Secondly*, It is loaded with two pressing absurdities; one, in supposing that the soldiers knew, while asleep, that the body was stolen, and by whom; another, in supposing that the Roman soldiers should by concert fall asleep on duty; and that they should industriously publish a neglect which was criminal, and must expose them to severe punishment.

“scattered *.” John is the only Apostle who stands on record as an exception. Jesus beheld him with his mother near the cross, in his last extremity. The appearance of the disciple on this occasion does him a great deal of honour, as it shows how entirely he possessed the friendship of his master, and at the same time, how well he deserved it. His presence at the cross furnished him as a historian with this fine incident *. It is simply and briefly described; on that account the more beautiful, as it relates to himself. It deserves notice, that at the time of the short interview betwixt Jesus and the disciple, the darkness occasioned by the eclipse must have been very great. Curiosity and anxiety would naturally prompt the disciple and his attendants to approach more nearly to the cross. Hence it would appear that this interview was private; a circumstance which fully accounts for the silence of the other historians on the subject.

* Matth. xxvi. 31. † John xix. 26.

C H A P. XIII.

Of his Resurrection.

THIS is unquestionably the most grand event in the history of Jesus. His giving life to others, how astonishing soever it may appear, must yield in splendor and importance to his rising from the grave. His enemies had said to him in scorn, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." Here we see him bursting the bands of death asunder.

THE resurrection of Jesus is an event which distinguishes his history from all others. The prophets, and apostles, after delivering the oracles of heaven to the world, died, and never were more heard of. We have the histories of men, who, after distinguishing themselves by their splendid achieve-

ments, died, and were counted divinities : But never was it alledged, that after their death they lived, and conversed in the world. If superstition, or policy, at any time ventured to bring them in view, it was only for a moment, instantly to disappear. Jesus, after his resurrection, not only appeared on this lower stage, but remained on it, while there was a doubt to dispel, and acted with a consistency of character, which of itself determines him to be the same person who had lived and died publicly.

THE credibility of the resurrection of Jesus, though not necessarily included in the plan of these observations, is so essential to the subject, that I cannot omit giving a selection of the circumstances presented in the history which serve to confirm it. To these I shall confine myself, and then proceed to the illustration of some other particulars which exhibit this whole transaction in a light equally beautiful and interesting.

S E C T. I.

Of the Credibility of his Resurrection.

IN order to establish this point, some writers have, with great accuracy, adjusted the seeming inconsistencies in the account given by the historians. Every writer has the privilege of chusing his subject, and, if he adhere firmly to truth, of dwelling on those parts of it which are most agreeable to himself, or which he judges to be of the greatest importance to others. On this subject one point is clear: All the historians agree in the material circumstances of the fact. Some relate them with greater copiousness than others; and, from the several particulars complexly viewed, we derive the most entire satisfaction.

THE credibility of the resurrection of Jesus rests on an immoveable basis. As a matter of fact, it is supported by the testimony both of enemies and friends.

THE circumstances which establish the certainty of his death, have been always

esteemed fundamental in ascertaining the credibility of his resurrection. The public manner of his death; the general persuasion that he was dead, before his body was taken down from the cross; the request of Joseph to have it taken down, and honourably deposited; the scrupulous inquiries of Pilate concerning the certainty of his death, and his satisfaction on that head, in consequence of which he granted the request; the sorrow of his friends, and their care about the funeral obsequies; are circumstances which must convince any reasonable person, that Jesus truly died.

THE enemies of Jesus gave out, that his body had been stolen away. This expedient they devised on purpose to discredit the information of the soldiers, who had watched at the sepulchre. But the effect of the expedient is destroyed by the precaution which they took to prevent a fraud. They had applied to Pilate for a guard to watch the sepulchre: As soon as they knew that the body was deposited, they had caused a great stone to be rolled to the mouth of the se-

pulchre, and had put their seal upon the stone. Hence arises the strongest presumption, that the body of Jesus could not have been taken away by his disciples or friends. His enemies could not, it seems, think of a more plausible resource than this, when they heard what had happened at the sepulchre. But it is evident that the information disconcerted them, and it is a great deal more than probable that they believed Jesus to have actually risen, according to his prediction, with which they were acquainted. They discovered no scruples about the possibility of the fact: They never attempted, by argument or insinuation, to persuade others that it was impossible. Pressed by facts, they forge a story of their own, and bribe the soldiers to propagate it; a story which contradicts itself, and which they had not the effrontery to produce in opposition to the apostles, who, wherever they went, published the resurrection of their master. The resurrection of Jesus was ridiculed by the Athenians; but never once ridiculed or impugned by the Jews. Probably they reflected that their forgery was

too glaring, and too open to detection. They were silent on every occasion where infallibly it would have been produced, could it have stood the test of examination and inquiry. This conduct furnishes a strong presumption, that the resurrection, as a matter of fact, is uncontrovertible.

THE testimony given by the friends of the cause comes next to be considered. Against testimony from this quarter, we are naturally prepossessed. We know, or feel the biases of friendship; What we fondly wish, we easily believe to be true; and, by the strength of affection for a person or his cause, we admit, on slender evidence, whatever has a tendency to promote his honour or advantage. But this specious objection, by a happy singularity, loses its force, when applied to the testimony of the friends of Jesus on the subject of his resurrection.

FIRST, it was an event of which they had no expectation. They had seen their master expire on the cross, and laid in the tomb. There all their hopes and views lay buried with him. Sorrow, in consequence of disappointment, and concern

for the remains of him whose fate they mourned, excluded every other reflection. Some women were honoured with the first notice of the resurrection of Jesus. They arrived very early at the sepulchre, to perform the funeral rites. The event itself never entered into their thoughts. The preparation of spices and ointments, the night in which Jesus was laid in the tomb; the renewing their pious labours, almost as soon as the Sabbath was over; their anxiety about rolling away the stone from the door of the sepulchre; their anxiety on seeing it rolled away without knowing the cause; the increase of their anxiety on seeing the sepulchre empty; are circumstances which convey to us, in the most lively manner, their despair of seeing Jesus risen again from the dead. How naturally is this sentiment expressed by the conduct and language of Mary? "She runneth to the
 "disciples Peter and John, and saith
 "to them, They have taken away the
 "Lord, and we know not where they
 "have laid him*." The two disciples

* John ix. 2

are instantly seized with the same anxiety. They run to the sepulchre, and make a particular inspection *. On finding it empty, they are as anxious as ever, and as much in the dark. "For they believed "not the scriptures, nor knew that he "was to rise from the dead;" and, in this persuasion, "went away to their own "home †." The timorousness of the sex prevented the women from making an accurate inspection of the tomb. The supposed credulity of the sex may be allowed all its force in weakening their testimony. But, when supported by the testimony of the two men who were at pains to have themselves fully informed, the evidence of the fact, that the body of Jesus was not in the tomb, is unexceptionable and satisfactory.

It appears that the other disciples were astonished with this information, but still despaired of ever seeing their master. This is evident from the history of the two disciples, whom Jesus met on the road to

* John xx. 5 6, 7, 8.

† Ver. 10.

Emmaus and interrogated, before they knew him, on the subject of their conversation, and on the sadness of their aspect. Their surprise at finding him ignorant of the transactions of the preceeding days; their account of their master, of his death, and of their disappointment in consequence of it; their account of the report made by the women, and then by the men, convey to us what were their views of this event, or rather convince us, that it was one of which they had not then the most remote apprehension. This passage has so much natural beauty in it, that a reader of taste will relish it, after the twentieth perusal. What relates to the sentiments of the two disciples is as follows:

“ One of them whose name was Cleopas,
 “ answering Jesus, said, Art thou only a
 “ stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not
 “ known the things which are come to
 “ pass in these days? And he said unto
 “ them, What things? And they said to
 “ him, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which
 “ was a prophet mighty in word, and in
 “ deed, before God and all the people; and

“ how the chief priests, and our rulers, deli-
 “ vered him to be condemned to death,
 “ and have crucified him. But we trust-
 “ ed that it had been he which should
 “ have redeemed Israel; and besides all
 “ this, to-day is the third day since these
 “ things were done; yea, and certain wo-
 “ men of our company made us astonished,
 “ which were early at the sepulchre; and,
 “ when they found not his body, they
 “ came, saying, that they had also seen a
 “ vision of angels, which said that he was
 “ alive. And certain of them which were
 “ with us, went to the sepulchre, and
 “ found it even so as the women had said,
 “ but him they saw not*.”

If the resurrection of Jesus was despair-
 ed of, or not expected by his friends, their
 testimony concerning it becomes highly
 credible. We are furnished with a strong
 presumption that the removal of the body
 was no work of theirs. It is absurd to

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* Luke, xxiv. 18. 24.

suppose, that it was effected by enemies. Hence the history of the resurrection gains in point of credibility. We are reduced to the necessity of believing it to have been effected by a supernatural interposition. Hence also we have all the satisfaction which we can desire, that the apostles were well qualified to attest the resurrection of their master, having no prospects, no passions, no interests prompting them to impose it on the world.

THE resurrection of Jesus was an event, not only unexpected, and despised of by his friends, but what they had the greatest difficulty to believe. If people are credulous from constitution, and impatient in their inquiries; if they are biassed by interest, or by any other motive, we act wisely in suspending our assent to their testimony. Had the disciples of Jesus been thus characterised, their testimony on the subject of his resurrection would have been without its principal support. If a slowness of assent to truth, if an inviolable attachment to one's system of prejudices, are the charac-

ters of incredulity, the disciples were certainly the most incredulous persons in the world. Jesus, in compassion to their prejudices, had foretold the events of his death and resurrection. They would not believe the one, and seemed to have no conception of the possibility of the other. He repeated the discovery over and over; but nothing short of demonstration could convince them. When they saw the first part of the prediction verified, still they doubted of the latter, and despised the first notice of its accomplishment. On these accounts, the charge brought against the two disciples extended to the whole fraternity: "O fools, and slow of heart
 "to believe all that the prophets have spo-
 "ken. Ought not Christ to have suffer-
 "ed these things, and to enter into his
 "glory *?"

Persons who are suspicious of imposture may hastily insinuate, that the incredulity of the apostles was all affectation and artifice. But their general character, of itself,

* Luke, xxiv. 25. 26.

weakens the allegation, and their conduct in this instance entirely overturns it. Artifice is so various in its features, that, on some occasions, it must necessarily betray itself. The face of truth, like that of nature, is regular and consistent. One who possesses either candour or penetration will at once determine, whether the incredulity of the apostles is natural or affected. No more is necessary than to attend to the plain historical account of their conduct. Thus, when the eleven were told by the women, in a most circumstantial manner, that Jesus was risen, "Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not*." When Jesus himself appeared to them, and in the most encouraging attitude, "They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit†." When Thomas, who had been absent, was told by his brethren of this interview, he replies with all the boldness of unbelief, "Except I shall see in his hands the prints of the

* Luke. xxiv. 11. † Verse, 37.

“nails, and thrust my hand into his side,
“I will not believe *.”

WE may easily affirm, that the person who is slow of belief, or who doubts with modesty, will believe with the greatest firmness, as soon as his doubts are dispelled. He is one who has viewed the subject on all sides, and is intimately acquainted with it on the dark side, supposing it to have any; for this reason his testimony as to facts, or his judgment in points of opinion, will outweigh in value that of a thousand enthusiasts. The other ten apostles, though modest in expressing it, yet were as full of distrust. Till Jesus shewed them his hands and his feet, they could not believe that he whom they saw was their master; and not till that wonder and confusion of thought was abated, which the first sensible evidence of the fact had produced.

THE intimacy of the disciples with their master during his life, is a circumstance so

* John, xx. 25.

far from weakening, that it crowns the merit of their testimony. When Jesus rose from the dead, he did not show himself openly to all the people. His conduct in this particular seems not to require an apology*. He conversed with those who had been the witnesses of his private life, and who could decide with more precision, as to his being the same person. From the affection which Jesus bore to them, and from the use which he intended to make of them, we expect that he would gratify them with the fullest means of conviction. Nor are we disappointed. With their eyes they saw him to be the same person with whom they had conversed, during an intimacy of three years. They saw the prints of the nails in these hands and feet, which had been fixed to the cross: They saw the wound in his side, out of which had

* Dr Aterbury, in his sermon on the subject, assigns three reasons for this conduct. It was not fit that such a favour should be indulged to his murderers. There was no probability that it would have the effect of converting them. And it was proper that they should be persuaded, but not compelled.

issued water and blood. For the removal of their doubts, they were called upon to touch him, and to put their hands to the scars of his wounds. They did eat and drink with him. He very often conversed with them, during his stay of forty days upon earth. In fine, they were favoured with a proof more enticing than any, the kindness and consistency of his behaviour, after the experience which he had of their weakness, or undutifulness. From these evidences, so satisfying, both to their senses, and their reason, they were enabled to say to others, " That which we
 " have heard, that which we have seen with
 " our eyes, that which we have looked
 " upon, and our hands have handled of
 " the word of life: That which we have
 " seen, and heard, declare we unto you*."

* 1 John i. 3.

S E C T. II.

*Of the Circumstances by which the Disciples
were prepared for the Discovery.*

IN the course of his public ministry Jesus had told the disciples more than once, that he was to rise again; from whence they might have concluded, that the event was not impossible: For the same end, he miraculously raised others from the grave. To excite an expectation of this event, he had pointed out the precise day when it should happen. Not only in private, but in his more public discourses, he had described the event, figuratively and disguisedly. When the Jews asked a sign of his authority as a public reformer, he refers them to the following one: "Destroy this Temple," meaning the temple of his body, "And in three days I will raise it up again*."

* John ii. 19.

On another occasion, "No sign shall be given to this generation, except the sign of the prophet Jonas : For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*."

SUCH was the lustre of his resurrection, such the slowness and incredulity of the disciples, that he chose to lead them on to the discovery by a chain of incidents subsequent to his death, and immediately preceeding his appearance among them. This gradual preparation gives a solidity to their evidence, as witnesses of the resurrection. They were not, by the lustre of the event, surpris'd into the belief of it ; nor is any one instance of their conduct, on this occasion, favourable to the charge of credulity.

THE present situation of the disciples was also very distressful : They were disappointed and dejected : They were easily terrified and alarmed. It was proper that they should be roused into an expectation of the event, and, at the same time, that the discovery should be conducted so as

not to overpower them. It has been already shown, that they had no expectation of seeing Jesus again; all their temporal hopes were now dissolved into despair. They had trusted that he was the redeemer of Israel, and they had seen him expire on the cross. In this situation some display of majesty was necessary to revive them.

THERE is a stupidity which sorrow is often found to produce. The disciples felt all its power on the death of their Master. Their sorrowful companions felt it, when they set out on their journey to the tomb of Jesus, to do the last duties of friendship. What incident better fitted to awaken their expectations than the following one? “Behold, there was a great earthquake: For the Angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightening, and his raiment white as snow, and, for fear of him, the keepers did shake, and became as dead men*.” The awful ap-

* Matth. xxviii. 2.

pearance of nature on this occasion, the descent of the Angel, his station at the door of the sepulchre, the splendour of his form, and the astonishment, which seized the guards, are circumstances which, taken in connexion, convey great ideas to the mind, and prepare us for some extraordinary event. It is true, that the apostles were not personally engaged in these transactions. The women, whose office it was to do the funeral honours, and who had set out early for that purpose, derived the immediate advantage. Yet the attention of Jesus to his apostles is discernible in his choice of the means by which they were prepared for the great discovery; and all that was done in favour of the other issues, at last, in the instruction or comfort of the apostles themselves.

It is beautiful to observe the gradual manner in which the discovery of the resurrection was made to the women. Their attention being now roused and awakened, we see them led on, by easy steps, to the appearance of Jesus himself risen from from the grave.

THE first step by which they are prepared for this event, is the removal of the body of Jesus out of the tomb. They knew not what was become of it, but were convinced that it was not there. Uneasy at missing it, they run to inform Peter and John. The disciples search the tomb, and are confirmed in the same persuasion. In this joint scrutiny they observe what, in their confusion, had formerly escaped them, "the linen cloaths in the sepulchre, laid by themselves, and the napkin that was about the head of Jesus, not lying with the linen, but wrapped together in a place by itself*." This circumstance, trivial as it may appear, afforded a strong presumption, or rather a striking proof, that no theft had been committed, as they at first imagined. It exhibited also a picture of that graceful ease with which Jesus rose from the grave; like one rising in the morning, and leaving behind him the cloaths which have covered him during the night. The dis-

* John xx. 6. 7.

ciples and their companions saw, that the body of Jesus was not in the sepulchre. This was the first step of their belief, and for which they had the evidence of their senses. Farther they did not, and could not advance, "for as yet they knew not "the scriptures, that he must rise again "from the dead*."

THE next preparatory step is the information given to the women by the angels, that Jesus was actually risen. It is not material, whether these women were the same persons who had come first to the sepulchre, or some of their company who had arrived later. It is enough, that they were in the same situation, "much "perplexed," because the body of Jesus was not to be found. The appearance of the angels doubtless increased their perplexity and surprise, "They were afright-
"ed, and bowed down their faces to the "earth†." But the appearance is finely softened, by the information which they receive, and by the manner in which it

* John xi. 8. 9. † Luke xxiv. 6.

is given. The discovery which the angel makes of his knowledge of their distress, his gentle rebuke on account of their laborious search, the positive assurance that Jesus was risen, his directing them to the spot where the body had been lying, his recalling to their minds the predictions of Jesus concerning his resurrection, the orders given them to acquaint the disciples with the event; in fine, the description of the place where, according to his own promise they might expect to meet him, are circumstances most happily concurring to introduce light and comfort gradually into their minds. The particulars of the information lie so close and rise so beautifully one above another, that they even give pleasure in the reading: "Why seek ye the living among the dead*?" "he is not here; he is risen as he said;" "Come see the place where the Lord lay," "and go and tell his disciples, that he is risen from the dead; and behold he

* Luke xxiv. 5. Matth. xxviii. 6. 7.

“ goeth before you into Galilee; There
 “ shall ye see him: Lo I have told you*”.

THE appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, the manner of the appearance, and the steps which led to the discovery, are incidents too important to be passed over in silence. This was perhaps the first person who, early in the morning, had arrived at the sepulchre. She saw that the stone was rolled away from the door; and, on finding the sepulchre empty, ran in search of the disciples to communicate her distress. They examine it, and then leave her alone. The solitude and gloominess of the scene, her distress on account of the supposed theft of the body of Jesus, her affection for it expressed by standing in tears at the door of the sepulchre, paint her as an object whose distress we wish to mitigate or remove. We are gratified by seeing it removed, and by such easy steps, as would no doubt make the transition to the joy, which followed the discovery, a great deal more tolerable. The appearance

* John. xx. 1.

of the angels at the sepulchre, as the guardians of the place, the tender and familiar manner in which they accost her, the appearance of Jesus himself, the compassionate air of his address, his kind inquiry into the cause of her sorrow, the manner of discovering himself, his forbidding her to touch him, his instantly charging her with a message to the disciples, joined to the nature of the message, are incidents all following each other, in the most beautiful train, and were excellently fitted to promote the comfort or instruction of the persons who were immediately interested in them.

IN this view, the message of Jesus to his apostles deserves particular notice. It not only informs them of the event, but the information is given in a manner the most soothing and solacing. The event was so unexpected that they could not fail to be surprised with it: Besides, one of them had denied, and, in the hour of danger, all had forsaken him. On this account their surprise at the notice of Jesus being risen must have been accompanied with those

uneasy apprehensions which the consciousness of crimes, or even of weakness, must always produce. A message by an angel might have overpowered minds like theirs, suspicious with guilt, and depressed with sorrow: But, from a message thus conveyed, so particular, and so affectionate, they could have nothing to fear, and every thing to hope for. His appellation of the disciples, his mention of Peter the prime offender, the place which he pointed out as the scene of their first interviews, the recalling to their memory his own promise to meet them there, are circumstances which strongly express, beyond what we can conceive, the ardour of his friendship, unallayed by their desertion, or by the greatness of his own sufferings: "Go tell my brethren," says Jesus to the women, "that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me * : Go," says the angel, "and tell his disciples and Peter, that he is risen from the dead, and, behold, he goeth before you into

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* Matth. xxvii. 10.

“ Galilee ; there shall ye see him, as he said
 “ unto you *.”

IN order to prepare the way for a full discovery, Jesus shows himself to two of his disciples †. But even this partial discovery is introduced by such a preparation of circumstances, as indicated his concern, that their conviction should not be the effect of surprise : It also displays him in one of those amiable lights in which they had seen him frequently, during his life. Every person, acquainted with the gospel history, will perceive, that these particulars, and a great many others, are exhibited in the interview on the road betwixt Jerusalem and Emmaus ‡. It is beautiful to observe the steps by which the disciples were led on to the discovery. It has been already observed, that it was highly proper, they should be led on to it gradually and insensibly. The sadness of their countenance, the conversation in which they were engaged on the subject of their distress, and the opportu-

* Matthew and Mark compared,

† Luke xxiv. 13.

‡ Luke xxiv. 13.

nity presented of mixing familiarly with them, were circumstances inviting the attention of Jesus, and which we behold him improving, to the great purpose of the interview. Persons in distress are easily set a talking on the subject of their distress: There is a fulness and overflowing of the heart, in such situations. The disciples, encouraged by the inquiries of Jesus, easily enter on the subject of his sufferings, and discover themselves to be under the power of prejudices which, previously to a discovery, it was highly proper for him to correct. In the mean time he was concealed by these very prejudices of the disciples, and by the casualty of the interview: Besides, "their eyes were holden," perhaps miraculously, "that they should not know him*." With this advantage, on his side, he enters on the subject of his sufferings; with freedom censures them for their slowness and unbelief; and, with his wonted kindness, begins to instruct them. It was not yet time to open their eyes, or to risk

* Luke xxiv. 16.

a discovery, by reminding them of his own predictions: But, "beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded "to them, in all the scriptures, the things "concerning himself *." This he did with such ardour and energy, that, after he had left them, they said one to another: "Did "not our hearts burn within us, while "he talked with us by the way, and opened to us the scriptures †!" The fullness and freedom of his discourse, the impressions which it made upon the disciples, their importunate invitation, his indulgent acceptance of it, and, after his wonted manner, sitting down to eat with them, are circumstances which had the most happy tendency to enlarge their views, and to prepare them for seeing, with open eyes, Jesus their master risen from the grave. The historian doth not leave us to conjecture the use which they made of the discovery: "They rose up the "same hour, and returned to Jerusalem,

* Luke xx v. 27.

† Ver. 32.

“and found the eleven, and they told
 “them what things were done in the way,
 “and how he was known of them in
 “the breaking of bread *.”

S E C T. III.

Of the Circumstances which attended the Discovery.

THE disciples being now ripened for the event, Jesus appears in the midst of them. There must have been a majesty in the appearance, to which they could not be insensible. They saw the same person, who had given life to others, himself triumphing over the power of the grave. In the manner of effecting this interview, there is a peculiar majesty: “When the doors were shut, where the disciples had assembled, Jesus came and “stood in the midst of them †.”

* Luke xxiv. 33 34.

† John xx. 19.

THE situation of the disciples was such, that unmingled majesty would have inspired them with terror. Majesty, softened by goodness, was an object more attuned to minds like theirs, depressed with melancholy, and prone to suspicion. In this more engaging form Jesus chose to make his first appearance; as, in the conduct of the whole, we see him giving the most graceful attention both to the conviction and the comfort of the disciples.

THE season of the discovery is one circumstance which has this aspect. Jesus showed himself to his disciples the evening of that day on which he rose. They had been prepared for his appearance, by a train of incidents, and were now awakened to the expectation of it. One of the historians describes it as immediately following the information given on the subject, by the two disciples from Emmaus*;

* "As they thus spoke, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them," Luke, xxvi. 36.

an information more particular and satisfactory than any preceeding one. A person who has felt the pain of suspense, will easily conceive what must have been the situation of the disciples during this short interval, and how kind it was in Jesus to relieve them. Or, supposing them to be in no suspense, which is not very probable ; yet, by a longer delay, the ardour excited by the first notices of the event might cool ; so that, betwixt doubt and fear, they would have quickly sunk down again into despair and insensibility.

JESUS appeared to his disciples, when they were sitting with shut doors for fear of the Jews*. If we look back to the terrifying scenes which they had lately witnessed, we shall not wonder at their having fears from this quarter. They were known to have been the companions and associates of Jesus. They had witnessed the opposi-

* John, xx. 19.

tion to their master during his life. They had seen him dragged away to a tribunal, and dying ignominiously. The malice and falsehood of their enemies exposed them to a thousand deaths. Their stealing the body of Jesus out of the tomb was a new charge, to which they were liable. In punishing this crime to the uttermost, the policy and falsehood of their enemies were concerned. If the disciples had felt the power of fear on former occasions, they were now in danger of being overwhelmed. The sources of their fears were increasing, and nothing could so effectually diminish them, as the appearance of Jesus risen from the grave.

THERE were fears of another kind, with which the disciples must have been agitated, arising from the consciousness of weakness or guilt, and the presence of Jesus could not fail to awaken it. He had clearly foretold that he was to rise again. This prediction they would not, or could not understand. They had received

it as a counterpoise to the discovery, and to the presence of his sufferings. In the hour of his suffering they had deserted or denied him, and the crime was enhanced by their protestations of fidelity*. In what attitude was it natural to expect the conqueror of the grave? In what awful glories must they not expect him?

To the circumstances and sentiments of the disciples, the appearance of Jesus is most beautifully accommodated: "Jesus stood in the midst of them, and saith to them, Peace be unto you†." He came in upon them familiarly when at meat: He addressed them with his wonted salutation. No upbraidings for their conduct; not a circumstance reminding them of it, or encouraging to their suspicions of having lost his favour: "He only upbraids them with their unbelief and hardness of their

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* Luke xxiv. 36. † Mark xvi. 14. compared with Luke xxiv. 41.

“ hearts, because they believed not them
 “ that had seen him after he was risen *.”

THE appearance of Jesus, mild and affectionate as it was, could not in a moment have all its effect. It is the nature of fear to confound the senses, to overcloud the understanding, and to check every better affection. The fears of the disciples suggested to them, that it was all a delusion: “ They were terrified and affrighted, and “ supposed that they had seen a spirit †.” This apprehension was first to be removed, before they could perfectly enjoy any declaration in their favour. Accordingly, we see Jesus consulting their comfort, with a condescension, on his part, extremely engaging. His kind expostulation with them on the subject of their uneasiness, his offer to submit to their scrutiny, his producing, without their asking, the certain marks by which they might know him, were such expedients for clearing their doubts, as no impostor would venture upon, and the fittest for producing a conviction, that he who did thus treat with

* Mark xvi. 14.

† Luke xxiv. 37.

them, was their indulgent master. I have already observed, that this perfect consistency of conduct was, to the disciples, an enticing and persuasive argument. They were not strangers to that graceful condescension, of which the displays had been frequent. They now saw it shining forth in its wonted beauty and lustre: "Why are ye troubled, and why
 "do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold
 "my hands and feet, that it is I myself;
 "handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not
 "flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And
 "when he had thus spoken, he shewed
 "them his hands and his feet*." As the evidence which he now offered to the disciples was, of all others, the most unexceptionable, we see it rising up gradually to its utmost height. By the hearing of their ears, by the sight of their eyes, and by the touch of their hands, they were led on, as by a scale of arguments, to the conclusion, that Jesus was the person conversing with

* Luke xxiv. 41.

them. And, in order to compleat the evidence of the fact, because "for joy they believed not, and wondered, he asked of "them meat, and did eat it before them*."

ANOTHER circumstance in this interview, fitted to dispel their fears, is his renewing the commission which he had formerly given them. This commission he gave

* The first and last object in this interview, was the dispelling the anxieties of the disciples about their interest in the favour of Jesus: "Peace be unto "you*," was his introductory salutation; and again he repeats it in the progress of the interview †. A repetition is not always unmeaning. It expresses an ardour in the person who makes it, and as often the importance of what is said to the person addressed. This ardour of attention to the comfort of the disciples, we may observe Jesus expressing, though not in the same words, yet with the same meaning, a little before his death: "Let not "your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. Peace I leave with you; my "peace I give unto you; let not your heart be "troubled, neither let it be affraid," Jo. xiv. 1. 27,

* Luke xxiv. 41.

† John xx. 21.

to the twelve, when he sent them out as assistants in his public ministry *. In consequence of their misbehaviour, he might have appointed others to be the publishers of his religion. But, having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end. Without new instructions, they would never have thought of entering again on their work; nor, without receiving them, could they be satisfied of possessing the confidence of their master. Afterwards the instructions were extended: But in the mean time they were delivered so clearly, and in terms so honourable for them, that there could be no doubt of their being taken into favour: "As
 " my Father hath sent me, even so send I
 " you. And when he said this, he breathed upon them, and said to them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost," whose office, as a comforter and guide, he had formerly explained to them.

IN fine, Jesus confers on the disciples the power of forgiving the sins of others. What conclusion must naturally follow

* Matth. x. 1.

from this declaration in their favour? Was it not equivalent to the most positive assurance, that their own sins were forgiven? Nor is it to be doubted, that the particularity of their situation would make them derive from it the highest degrees of comfort.

THE discovery which Jesus made of himself to Thomas, one of the disciples who had been absent from the first interview, deserves our particular notice. To the other ten it afforded an additional evidence of the truth and reality of the resurrection of their master. It is also a beautiful incident; and expresses that graceful condescension with which all the private scenes of his life are adorned. The absence of Thomas gave occasion to his scruples concerning the matter of fact. We could excuse them, had they been produced with modesty, and yielded with candour: But, supposing that he did not distrust the veracity of his brethren, his scruples and de-

mands were highly unreasonable. By following his own tract, and without further light, the disciple might have been an infidel all his life. But his gracious master would not suffer him to lose by an absence which, perhaps, was not his fault; nor did he punish him for his scruple, though unreasonable and obstinately maintained, but treated him with a condescension which overcame every doubt, and which produced the most intire conviction: "My Lord, and "my God*." His delaying for eight days to meet with Thomas, his allowing him all that time to deal with himself, his particular address to him in the presence of the other ten disciples, his kind attention to his scruples, his indulgent manner of treating them, his granting all that he had desired for the removing of his scruples before he had time to propose them, and before he could recover from his surprize, are circumstances in the conduct of Jesus,

* John, xxi. 38.

which very naturally made him an object of adoration to the disciple, as well as to the other witnesses of this scene. The importunity and impetuosity on one side, and the indulgence on the other, exhibit a lively contrast: "Except I shall see in
 " his hands the print of the nails, and
 " thrust my hand into his side, I will not
 " believe*." This was the demand of the disciple made in the presence of his brethren. Jesus, at his second visit to the disciples, instantly singles him out and accosts him: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold
 " my hands, and reach hither thy hand,
 " and thrust it into my side, and be not
 " faithless but believing†."

THE prepossessions of the disciple are advantageous to his character, as a witness of the fact, that Jesus rose from the dead. By the satisfactory manner in which they were removed, the change produced in his

* John, xx. 25.

† Verse 27.

sentiments is by no means chargeable with the imputation of enthusiasm: On the contrary, his belief was rational and solid; for which reason his testimony may be fully relied upon.

S E C T. IV.

Of his Care to strengthen the minds of the Disciples.

THERE were two points, in the persuasion of which, it was greatly important, that the disciples should be fixed: *First*, That the person whom they saw was truly their master. *Secondly*, That his friendship for them was unbroken and entire: The former gives a strength to their testimony as witnesses of the resurrection; the latter was necessary to secure their minds against suspicion and distrust. By the former, the honour of their public character was consulted. By the latter, their personal comfort and peace. With what peculiar attention to these objects Jesus conducted himself during his stay on earth,

furnishes a topic of very beautiful and interesting speculation.

JESUS lived on earth, forty days after his resurrection. This circumstance, the length of his stay, strengthens the evidence of the fact on one side, where it must have been the most open to suspicion. Had he only spent a few days or hours with his disciples, their conviction of the reality of what they saw would have been less complete, and they might have been chargeable with credulity. But their interviews with their master, and the proofs which he gave them, were spread out into a large space. Hence, as their belief was coolly ascertained, the credibility of the fact is most satisfactorily established. Opinions which are hastily formed, or proofs which lie crowded in confusion, are never favourably attended to. Jesus staid on earth with his disciples, while there was the possibility of a doubt arising, which his presence could either remove or prevent.

It has been observed, that his stay of forty days bears an analogy to the retreat of Moses and Elias, and to his own retreat

at the commencement of his ministry. He did not, however, during this period, live wholly in solitude. The public had rendered itself unworthy of this divine guest: But, at proper intervals, his meetings with the disciples were frequent, and all of them were directed to the great ends of their comfort or stability. There may have been other days, when Jesus met with the disciples: But that, on which he rose from the grave, seems to have been peculiarly consecrated to this purpose: This circumstance suggests one good reason why that day was always held sacred by the disciples, and why other christians have followed their example.

THE interview with the disciples at the sea of Tiberias is preserved in the history of John, the beloved friend of Jesus. It is indeed an incident which could not well escape the attention of one smitten, on all occasions, with the grace and beauty of his master's character*. Jesus approached the disciples when they were fishing, and appeared on the shore in the dawn of the

* John xxi. 1.

morning, as a person observing them from mere curiosity. He had formerly made himself known in the breaking of bread. He had given them sensible evidence that he was their master. But the present interview is distinguished by peculiar displays both of power and goodness. Their going out a fishing, and their ill success, presented an occasion which Jesus takes hold of for working a miracle. It deserves notice, that almost every circumstance in the miracle is fitted, with the utmost propriety, to the purposes of their instruction and comfort.

“There were together,” says the historian, “Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, and the two sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples*.” For the benefit of these persons, the miracle was performed; and they are the very persons, whom, on such an occasion, we would expect to see distinguished. Simon Peter, the zealous disciple of his master, who,

* John xxi. 2.

through surprize denied him, had the reflection of his crime, spreading a gloom on his mind. Thomas had distinguished himself by his slowness and unbelief. Nathaniel, though an honest man, had discovered early the most vulgar prejudices. Peter, and the sons of Zebedee, had witnessed the brightest, and also the darkest scenes of the life of their master. These, with two disciples occasionally present, were selected to be the witnesses of the miracle.

ANOTHER circumstance deserving our notice, is the scene of the miracle: "The sea of Tiberias," the same which is called elsewhere the lake of Gennesareth; a place well known to the disciples. On the banks of this lake, they had seen Jesus instructing multitudes, and feeding them miraculously. From a vessel on this lake, they had seen him commanding the winds and the waves to be still. From thence, also, they had been called to be fishers of men, after experiencing his power in the miraculous draught of fishes. The circumstance of the place was, therefore, fitted to give a weight to the present miracle, and to

direct their attention to the person, by whose presence and power it was wrought.

THE distress of the disciples on this occasion, their ignorance of the presence of Jesus, the familiarity of his address, the kind direction which he gave them, their wonderful success, and the discovery of which it was the occasion, form a connection of incidents, which renders the whole a most beautiful piece of history. But it is more important to remark, that this interview served the valuable purposes of strengthening the disciples in the persuasion, that their master was risen; that he was the person conversing with them; and that his affection for them was entire. In the miracle now wrought, these ends were accomplished. The direction to cast the net on the right side of the vessel, rather than on the left, was a mean totally inadequate to the effect produced. That whole night they had caught nothing. At the word of Jesus, "they let down, and now they were not able to draw it, for the multitude of

"fishes *." One of the disciples very reasonably concluded; "It is the Lord †." Another, in a transport of joy, expressive of his constitutional ardour, girt on his fishers coat, and threw himself into the sea, at the distance from the shore of two hundred cubits ‡.

THERE is one very enlightening circumstance in the present miracle; I mean, its similarity to the miracle by which the disciples were first directed and attached to their master. The latter miracle was fitted to recall the former: Betwixt the two, there is a trifling dissimilarity; but they agree in every capital circumstance, and both issued in the entire conviction and satisfaction of the disciples ||.

* John xxi. 6. † Ver. 7. ‡ Ibid.

Luke v. 4. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets, for a draught.	John xxi. 3. Simon Peter saith to them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, we also go with thee. They went forth and entered into a ship immediately: and that night they caught nothing.
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In the progress of this interview, we see this miracle supported by another immediately following it. In both we see the

5. And Simon answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at thy word, I will let down the net.

6. And when they had done this they inclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net brake.

7. And they came and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

8. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus knees saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of fishes which they had taken.

4. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not it was Jesus.

5. 6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side and ye shall find. They cast therefore; and now they were not able to draw it, for the multitude of fishes.

7. Therefore that disciple, whom Jesus loved, saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now, when Peter heard it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, and did cast himself into the sea;

* The miracles of Jesus are related with the utmost simplicity of expression. As the historians were not men of refinement, the presumption is strong, that the miracles were not their own forge-

same object pursued : the fixing the disciples in the persuasion that Jesus was the person with whom they now conversed. " As soon as they came to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread *." I observed that the shore of this lake had been the scene of the great miracle of feeding thousands with a few loaves and fishes ; a miracle of Jesus not only performed under the eye of the disciples, but where, with their own hands, they had been the dispensers of his bounty. The present miracle would naturally recall to their memory the former. Both were excellently fitted to inspire the beholders with sentiments of veneration. Hence, when Jesus invited the disciples on this occasion, to partake of the entertainment which he had miraculously provi-

ries. The conduct of Peter on the two occasions above cited, was too trifling a circumstance in a forgery. But no person of taste and sensibility will allow it to be a trifle, supposing the miracles to be true. Besides, its features will strike them, as those of nature and truth.

* John xxi. 9.

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ded, none of them durst ask him, " who
 " art thou," not from distrust, but from
 the fulness of their persuasion, " know-
 " ing that it was the Lord."

But the intention of this interview was
 not yet fully accomplished. Jesus had gi-
 ven his disciples the most satisfying evi-
 dence that he was to rise again, and that the
 dignity of his character was unimpaired.
 It yet remained that they should receive
 entire satisfaction on the subject of being
 restored into favour, or that former de-
 clarations on the subject should be renew-
 ed. This we see him effecting in a conver-
 sation with Peter, in the hearing of the o-
 ther disciples. They had all deserted him
 in the hour of trial. Peter, with oaths and
 curses, had denied him. If this prime of-
 fender was gently dealt with, they too
 might expect indulgence: If his crime
 was forgiven him, they had no reason to
 despair. Jesus engages in a particular con-
 versation with this disciple in presence
 of the company with whom he sat at
 meat. John the beloved friend of his
 master, on this occasion, seems to be
 overlooked. Peter has the appearance

of meriting a preference, having been the most eager in his advances to Jesus, as soon as he knew that it was he. Besides, he had formerly confessed Jesus to be the Christ, and had been rewarded for his confession. His crime was great, and great the height of honour from which he had fallen. Here, on every account, was a fit object of compassion. Jesus reminds him of his offence, but doth so with a peculiar delicacy.

HE enters on the unpleasant task immediately after they had been dining together. There are certain seasons fitter than others, for entering on subjects which give pain. An indulgence to the confusion of the disciple is discovered by the choice of the season for reminding him of his fault.

JESUS enters on the subject immediately after the disciple had given a remarkable display of affection for his master. On all occasions, he stands distinguished by the ardour of his affection. He was the last who forsook Jesus, when surrounded by his enemies, and e-

ven then, not till after he had drawn the sword in his defence. He was the first disciple at the sepulchre, on the morning of the resurrection. In the same light he appears on the present occasion: While his companions keep by the vessel, at the sight of his master, he casts himself into the sea, and swims ashore. In a few moments he is directed to the unpleasant subject of his denial and desertion, while he had not only the consciousness of his sincerity, but of his affection to strengthen him. In this favourable juncture, the trying question is thrice put to him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me *."

JESUS reminds the disciple of his offence by this very question. This was doing it with an equal poignancy and delicacy. His silent but piercing look had melted the disciple into the most tender condition, a few moments after he had committed the offence. On this occasion, these sentiments are revived, by a question which, simply considered, expresses the language of friendship. As it was thrice

* John xxi. 17.

put to Peter, it could not fail to distress him by its reference to his threefold denial. Accordingly, we are told, that when Jesus said the third time, " Lovest thou me more than these?" the disciple was grieved; nor could he comfort himself, except by a more solemn appeal to him who knew his integrity: " Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee *."

JESUS doth still more for the relief of the disciple. His jealousies were alarmed, and indeed no wonder. He had every thing to fear from the reflection of his own mind, and nothing to hope, but from the indulgence of his Master. Peter had received the promise of a very distinguished honour, and now would suspect a forfeiture of it, as the lowest punishment of his infidelity. Without a positive declaration on this head, the jealousies of the disciple could not be allayed or removed. This was beautifully effected by the following charge thrice given him, and expressed with a

* John xxi. 17.

brevity and solemnity suitable to the occasion: "Jesus saith unto him, Feed my "sheep*."

IN fine, Jesus intimates to his disciple the honour of being an illustrious sufferer in his cause. Perhaps the disciple did not comprehend the full meaning of the intimation, at the very instant when it was made: Perhaps he could not, till he entered on his publick character. In this event it was of importance, that he should be armed for the conflict, as well as cheered by an exhibition of the trophies of victory. His own fate was to be pointed out, that his choice of the arduous service might be voluntary, and consequently the more honourable. Therefore, in allusion to his girding himself that he might swim a shore, Jesus thus accosts the disciple: "Verily, verily, "I say unto thee, when thou wast young, "thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: But when thou art old, "thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and carry thee, whi-

* John xxi 17.

“ther thou wouldest not. This spake he,
 “signifying by what manner of death he
 “should glorify God *.”

S E C T. V.

Of his parting Instructions.

THE apostles had received instructions from their master, during his public ministry. It was now highly proper, that these instructions should be renewed: They were conscious of having acted weakly, and dishonourably: Jesus indulgently furnished them with materials of comfort. Still, however, their suspicions might have recurred, had they not been formally reinstated in their office.

IT was also highly proper that their instructions should be enlarged. Jesus had confined them, during his own life, within the narrow limits of Ju-

• John xxi. 18.

dea. A more extensive sphere of action, and the narrowness of their views, made an enlargement of their instructions not only proper, but necessary. Accordingly, their commission is extended to all the nations of the earth. On this subject, the apostles were soon to be enlightened miraculously. While, confined within Judea, the gift of tongues, which they received at Pentecost, must have been useless, and insignificant. In the mean time, Jesus displays the reasonableness and propriety of the designed extension.

FIRST, he directs them to the testimony given by the scriptures on this subject. The scriptures had foretold his death and resurrection. The disciples had seen these events accomplished: They had the same reason, and this additional one, to believe, that every other event would be accomplished in its due time. The universality of the Messiah's kingdom, was a sentiment of which the Jews were exceedingly fond. The disciples naturally ought to have adopted it; but they were fettered

by their prejudices. Hence it was proper to remind them, "that thus it was written, "and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and "to rise from the dead." And that "repentance and remission of sins should be "preached in his name, among all nations *".

JESUS not only enlarges their commission, but instructs them very particularly concerning the manner of executing it: "Ye shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, "in Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth †." The religion which they were called to publish was to be rapid, but at the same time regular and orderly in its progress. This manner of proceeding was suitable to its dignity. Jews and Gentiles might have been converted to it, almost in the same instant: But it was more for the honour of christianity, that the reason and understanding of men should leisurely go along. As miracles

* Luke xxiv. 46.

† Acts i. 8.

were necessary to introduce it to the world, so this conduct served, in some measure, to secure its establishment.

JERUSALEM was the place where the disciples must open their instructions. It had been the scene of the humiliation and sufferings of Jesus: With much propriety it was made the scene of those miraculous displays which adorned the first publication of his religion. It had a sacredness belonging to it, which neither the decline of its power, nor the vices of its inhabitants, could wholly obliterate: "Out of Zion shall come forth the law," are the words of one "prophet:*" "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined †," are the words of another, when describing the Almighty "calling the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof." Besides, had the apostles been commanded to open their instructions in a place remote from the scene of the transactions

* Isaiah.

† Psalms l. 1.

which they published, they might have been suspected of carrying on an imposition. But they began at Jerusalem; so that their doctrine became immediately the subject of inquiry and examination. Had their doctrine been an imposition, it must have been instantly detected; or, supposing it to be true, it must flourish and prosper. Accordingly it did spread through Judea and Samaria, and from thence to the utmost parts of the earth; thereby illustrating that beautiful similitude and prediction of Jesus on the subject; "Unto what
 " is the kingdom of God like, and where-
 " unto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain
 " of mustard seed which a man took, and
 " cast into his garden, and it grew, and
 " waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the
 " air lodged in the branches of it*.

BUT, above all, it was of importance, that the disciples should be cheered and encouraged in executing their instructions. Here we have the pleasure to ob-

* Luke, xxiii, 18. 19.

serve, that the encouragements proposed are accommodated with the most perfect propriety to the distresses of the disciples.

In executing their instructions, they would be opposed by the powers of the world. On this head, the warnings of Jesus had been so full and alarming, that the least apprehension of danger must easily recall them: "Beware of
"men, for they will deliver you up to the
"councils, and they will scourge you in
"the synagogues. Ye shall be brought
"before kings and governors for my
"sake*." He had told them, that they must not expect better treatment than their master. They had seen him opposed through his life, and at last brought to a violent death. In his sufferings, which were fresh in their minds, they clearly saw their own. Hence, they must have shuddered at their fate, or have been in danger of flying away from it. In this posture, what consideration more animating than the

* Matth. x.

following, which was now suggested, "All power is given to me in heaven, and in earth *?" An assertion supported by his ascension, and all its splendid consequences.

THE disciples would feel distress from the then improved state of the world with respect to learning and policy. Hitherto they stand characterised by weakness, both in understanding and in conduct. The consciousness of either might be easily awakened. They had very lately deserted their master. His just reproof was still fresh in their minds; "O fools and slow of heart to believe." Yet these are the persons who are charged with publishing his religion to the ends of the earth; who, in supporting it, must be unavoidably opposed not only by the power, but by all the learning and policy of the world. The contest was unequal, and on one side, no probability of success. Jesus had assured them that they should not be losers by his absence. He had promised another comforter to guide

* Matth. xxviii. 18.

and assist them. Here this idea is seasonably and beautifully recalled to their minds; all that he had said on this subject formerly being easily suggested by the few words spoken on the present occasion: "Behold I send you the promise of my Father upon you. Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, till ye be endued with power from on high *."

In fine, the disciples must be distressed by the corruptions and prejudices of the world. The spirituality of their doctrine, and the meanness of their external appearance, were but ill adapted for overcoming these obstacles. Without credentials of the most respectable kind, the consequences which must have followed are obvious. The extraordinary lights promised to them were indeed a security for their own conduct. Yet, for overcoming the prejudices and corruptions of the world, more striking displays of the interposal of heaven seemed to be necessary. When the apostles began to exercise the gift of

* Luke. xxiv. 49.

tongues, their enemies employed against them the engine of ridicule. But the bolder miracles, which soon followed, effectually silenced them. They were driven to the absurd expedient of opposing the apostles by force. These expedients proved unsuccessful, and, by their want of success, the world came to be convinced, that opposition was vain. All this Jesus allowed the apostles to have the comfort of knowing : “ These signs shall
 “ follow them that believe. In my name
 “ shall they cast out devils; they shall
 “ speak with new tongues. They shall take
 “ up serpents; and if they drink any thing
 “ deadly, it shall not hurt them; they shall
 “ lay hands on the sick, and they shall re-
 “ cover †.”

* Mark xvi. 19.

† Matth. xxii. 17.

S E C T. VI.

Of his Ascent into Heaven.

THIS subject has been so fully treated by the ablest writers, that it is a difficult matter to produce any thing upon it which can either entertain or instruct the reader. As an incident in the history of Jesus, several particulars present themselves to our notice; there are some which ascertain it to be a matter of fact, some which exhibit its majesty, and others which express a most beautiful accommodation to the circumstances of the disciples.

SCEPTICAL persons are fond of observing, that the credulity of mankind, with respect to miraculous events, has been greatly imposed upon. But to deny, or to doubt of the existence of truth, because falsehoods have been admitted, is an absurdity against which every reasonable man ought to be on his guard. The features of truth and falsehood are so wide of each other, that no uncommon degrees

of sagacity are necessary to distinguish them. The ascension of Jesus into heaven is an event, for the truth of which we have all the evidence which the case can admit.

THE apostles had the best reason to be persuaded, that Jesus, risen from the grave, was the person with whom they were now conversing. Their entire satisfaction on this head, strengthened by the conviction of hundreds, qualified them to be competent witnesses of his ascension. On this subject, their testimony is the more unexceptionable, as the ascension was an event which they did not expect or desire. Their hopes and views were centered on a different object: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel *?" In the subject of their testimony, their passions and prepossession had no manner of interest. Besides, the ascension of Jesus was open and visible: The witnesses had every advantage for observing coolly and attentively all that passed, and had in-

* Acts i. 6.

deed no temptation from any quarter to impose a falshood on the world. When we also take into the account the predictions which preceded, and the miraculous effects which followed this event, we have every material which we can conceive possible or necessary for establishing its credibility.

THE majesty of the transaction next demands our notice ; Jesus ascended in a cloud ; and angels attended him. These circumstances, together with the connection of the whole, with his coming to judgment, serve greatly to aggrandize the scene.

CLOUDS are with much beauty and majesty filed in scripture the chariots of God. Under the Old Testament dispensation, they were actual emblems of his presence. Such was the cloud in the wilderness of Sinai, and in the temple of Solomon. Dr Tillotson considers the cloud in which Jesus ascended as a designed contrast to the fiery chariot of Elijah ; as an emblem of that mildness which distinguished the character and ministry of the one, in opposition to the boldness and ferocity of the other. But we

suspect it was chiefly intended to convey an idea of that divine majesty which Jesus chose to exhibit to his disciples, when about to part with them, and to preserve that idea lively in their minds.

IN the description given of the divine majesty, the attendance of angels very often makes a part: "The clouds are his chariots. "He makes his angels spirits, and his "ministers a flame of fire*." The presence of angels on this occasion is therefore not an unmeaning circumstance. It embellishes and aggrandizes the scene, and gives a dignity to the person, whose figure, on all accounts, is the most distinguished.

THE connection of this event with the second coming of Jesus, is also a circumstance which exhibits its majesty: A connection not wholly formed by the present juncture, nor by the authority of the heavenly messengers, but by the purpose of God, and by the repeated affirmations of Jesus: "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment

* Psalm. civ. 3.

“ to the Son *.” “ The Son of man shall
 “ come in all his glory, and his holy an-
 “ gels with him †.” Had the disciples
 been possessed of just notions of this sub-
 ject, it must have greatly exalted the pre-
 sent event in their eyes. The two events
 are described to be similar in several
 circumstances, and they reflect a lustre
 on each other. Indeed, nothing could
 give a more grand idea of the ascension
 to the admiring spectators, than the fol-
 lowing address of the angel: “ Ye men
 “ of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into
 “ heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken
 “ up from you into heaven, shall so come
 “ in like manner as ye have seen him go
 “ into heaven‡.”

It is beautiful to observe the accommo-
 dation of this event to the case of the dis-
 ciples§. There are two capital objects which
 Jesus evidently had in his eye on this oc-

* John, vi. 22. † Matth. xxv. 32. ‡ Acts i. 11.

§ Its accommodation in the following particulars
 is illustrated by Dr Tillotson. Jesus ascended in
 the sight of the disciples; he ascended while he was
 blessing them; and, by the manner of his ascension,

caſion, reſpecting them. Firſt, The checking their ſanguine hopes of a temporal kingdom; and next to this, the keeping alive their hope in his promiſes. Their fond curioſity about a temporal kingdom, they diſcovered in this parting interview, and were properly reprimanded for it. Almoſt every circumſtance in the tranſaction ſerved to enlighten them on this ſubject. They ſaw with their eyes Jeſus aſcend, they ſaw angels accompanying him, and ſaw a cloud receive him out of their ſight.

BUT the ſorrow of the diſciples upon their maſter leaving them, would alſo, at this time, offer itſelf to his compaſſionate mind. The regret of Eliſha at parting with Elijah, muſt have been greatly exceeded by the diſtreſs of the diſciples on the preſent occaſion, had not Jeſus, with much indulgence, taken

confirmed all the doctrines which he had taught, eſpecially that of a future judgement.

Tillot. Sermon. vol. 3. page 261. fol. edit.

measures to prevent it. He had done this in his long farewell discourse *. But, by the manner of his ascension, these sources of comfort were opened afresh for their relief. When they saw him ascend to heaven, when they heard the angels declare, that, with all the glories of an exalted state, he would certainly come again, how naturally, how forcibly must his own words rush in upon their minds? “It is expedient for you that I go away †. I will pray the Father, and he will send you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever ‡. Let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions ; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also ||.” That these

* John xiv. xv. xvi.

† John xvi. 7.

‡ xiv. 14.

|| xiv. 1. 2. 3.

words of Jesus were full of meaning, and that the circumstances of the ascension did serve to illustrate and enforce them, will appear from attending to the effects instantly produced on the sorrowful disciples: "They returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were daily in the temple, praising and blessing God*."

* Luke xxiv. 52.

T H E E N D.

7 AP 52

